



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

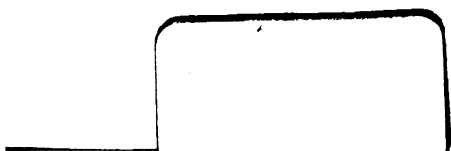
- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



[25



[Miss — Cornelia]

Dear Wolff

Believe me, very truly,
Your friend,
Miss Cornelia

THE

HOME AT HEATHERBRAE.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

THE
HOME AT HEATHERBRAE.

A TALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'EVERLEY.'

Any man that walks the mead,
In bud, or blade, or bloom, may find,
According as his humours lead,
A meaning suited to his mind.
And liberal applications lie
In Art, like Nature, dearest friend ;
So 'twere to cramp its use, if I
Should hook it to some useful end.
TENNYSON.

LONDON:
J. MASTERS AND CO., NEW BOND STREET.

1875.

All rights reserved.



THE HOME AT HEATHERBRAE.

CHAPTER I.

With pleasure drugged, he almost long'd for woe.
Childe Harold.

THE London season was nearly over. The heat, glare, and dust of the great capital made it intolerable even to the most persistent seekers after excitement. Some few had already flown

From vice and London far,
To breathe in distant fields a purer air ;

and the mind of the multitude began to turn gratefully to the thought of country pleasures, and idle wanderings on sandy shores, where 'every breeze bears health upon its wings.'

It was past noon, and not all the contrivances of art could make the grand and sombre dining-room of a house in Grosvenor Square otherwise than insufferably hot. Luncheon was upon the table, and the lady of the house, Mrs. Pierrepont, was seated at one end in a comfortable chair, dividing her attention between a novel that rested on her knee and some 'crème Parisienne' on the table by her side. Luncheon at the Pierreponts was always to be found on the table between the hours of one and two, and as it was understood that at this meal none of the family waited for the rest, Mrs. Pierre-

pont's enjoyment of her cream and her novel was in no degree marred because she enjoyed them alone.

She had fairly reached the noon of life, and although her good looks had not yet deserted her, she had become aware that the addition of an airy fabric of blonde and pink ribbon to her still glossy brown hair increased the youthfulness of her appearance, instead of serving as a badge of age. Mrs. Pierrepont was a pleasant person in society—always 'blithe and debonnaire,' an agreeable hostess, and an unexceptionable wife. The cares of motherhood had never added a wrinkle to her smooth brow, nor had the loss of a mother's joys ever drawn from her a heart-felt sigh. An exemplary husband and an abundance of wealth had fallen to her lot, and with these she was amply content.

A carriage drew up before the door, and a moment afterwards Mr. Pierrepont entered the room. He was tall, and of noble bearing and appearance, with a sprinkling of silver in hair and whisker, but still in the full prime of life. He had for many years represented in Parliament the interests of a small borough in the west of England, where his family were owners of the soil. He was an active and intelligent member of the House, content to be rather useful than conspicuous, and as such, valued and esteemed.

'You are earlier than you expected to be,' said his wife, closing her book, and drawing nearer to the luncheon table.

'I am; I met Lewis on his way here, and he told me Grant left town for Hastings yesterday.'

'Was Mr. Lewis coming here?'

'Yes, he wished to see me upon business, about which I will tell you presently. Where is Gabrielle?'

'I don't know; I have not seen her since breakfast. I dare say she is in her room.'

Mr. Pierrepont rang the bell. 'Tell Miss Hope I wish to speak to her if she is disengaged.'

There was an interval of some minutes, during which Mr. Pierrepont applied himself to the cold chicken. Then the door opened and a young lady entered the

room. She was a little above the middle height, clad in clear white muslin with a waistband of blue. She might be about twenty years of age, and was well grown and graceful, with a fair complexion, and hair of a golden brown, which took a ruddy hue in the sunlight. Her face was one hard to describe. She was seldom called pretty or handsome, though some few thought her beautiful; but the epithet most often applied to her was the safe and vague one of 'charming.' If the term means 'possessed of charms,' she could fairly lay claim to it. She had charm of manner, charm of voice, charm of eye and smile. The eye of clear, dark bluish gray, with large pupil and dark eyelash, was full of expression. So entirely was the individuality of the person concentrated in the eye, that those who met Gabrielle Hope face to face forgot to observe whether the nose was Grecian or aquiline, or the shape of the face oval or round. Wise or foolish they went away chanting the same refrain, 'charming!'

Now there is a charm of manner and expression which continues to retain the epithet, even after its very essence has been extracted by the premeditated intention to charm. This was not the case with Gabrielle. She could scarcely, indeed, have reached womanhood without becoming conscious of beauty, but, owing possibly to the fact that she had received admiration and attention from her earliest years, she was careless of exciting the former, and, in most instances, somewhat impatient of receiving the latter.

Such was Gabrielle Hope—Mr. and Mrs. Pierrepont's niece, and, to all intents and purposes, adopted daughter.

'Do you want me, uncle?'

'Come in, my dear. What have you been doing with yourself?'

'Doing, uncle!—nothing—at least, nothing that is anything. Is there anything to do?—I'm sure I shall be so glad; that is to say, if it is worth doing.'

'Eat some chicken, in the first place, or some of your aunt's flummery, yonder. I suppose that is worth doing?'

'I think not—it seems only just now that we breakfasted, and it is too hot to eat, and I am tired of flummeries. I wonder how bread and turnips taste?'

'Very nasty!' said Mrs. Pierrepont, with energy.

'You needn't wonder long,' said her uncle. 'Make the experiment. Must they be boiled or raw?'

'I don't know—I suppose they are boiled. You were reading an article at breakfast-time upon underpaid labourers, and there was an account of a family who lived upon bread and turnips. I don't know why I thought so much about it, but one is always craving for something new, and this was quite a new idea to me.'

'I should think so,' said Mrs. Pierrepont, helping herself anew to the cream.

'They do live upon it,' said Gabrielle, reflectively, 'and work upon it, and laugh, and talk, and make merry over it; at least, I suppose so. I dare say it has quite a different taste to them from what it has to us. And yet how odd it seems: bread and turnips—turnips and bread—from Monday morning to Saturday night—and the same again on Sunday.'

'You are not looking well, Gabrielle,' said her uncle, regarding her.

'As well, uncle, as heat and ennui will permit.'

'Ennui! a young lady of your age and prospects talking of ennui! The season has been rather too fatiguing for you. Brighton breezes will soon make roses bloom on your cheeks again.'

'No, indeed, uncle; better London than Brighton.'

'Really? Why, I thought you were tired of town life.'

'So I am, weary to death; but then what is life at Brighton but town-life—don't I know the whole programme after four successive seasons? There might be some variety in remaining in town after every one had left it, but there can be none in following all the fashionable world to a fashionable watering-place.'

'After all it is variety you are pining for; and yet, in your interest in the turnip problem, you have never even asked me if I have any news for you. What would you give for a piece of real news?'

'I would give almost anything for news that could make me clasp my hands and say, "How perfectly delicious!" as I heard a young lady say yesterday.'

'Then for once I really think I can gratify you,' said Mr. Pierrepont, smiling. 'What should you say if I told you you were an heiress?'

'First of all, I should ask if you were joking.'

'Never less so in my life.'

'Who could think of leaving money to me? How odd!'

'Is it "perfectly delicious"?''

'I don't know; I don't see what difference it makes. I never had a wish ungratified before, and what can I have more now?'

'Why, Gabrielle, you are contentment personified.'

'Contentment! A more discontented wretch never trod the earth. I don't care for money only because I always had more than I could spend. Have you forgotten your perplexity last Christmas when you had to find an investment for the money I didn't know what to do with?'

'That was but a question of a few hundreds; this is a different matter.'

'What may this be a question of—a few millions?'

'Really, your flights are hard to follow. Just now it was bread and turnips, and now you are toying with millions.'

'Perhaps it is a case in which extremes meet. I dare say many a millionaire knows as little of the true value of money as the hero of bread and turnips, who never had a gold coin in his pocket. But now I am in earnest. How much am I to be the richer?'

'You will be able to add a cipher to your present income.'

'I sigh for no cipher,' said Gabrielle, drolly; 'but the figure will do to represent the value this marvellous fortune conveys to my mind.'

'It is very well to joke,' said Mrs. Pierrepont, 'but "a fortune's a fortune for a' that." You are an heiress now.'

‘What then?’—

‘It makes all the difference to your future prospects,’ said her uncle. ‘We may live to see you a duchess.’

‘If I should take it into my head to be sick-nurse to an old duke, or pay the debts of a young one. You said just now my flights were hard to follow, uncle.’

‘And so are mine, you think. What will you do with all this money unless you give some one the right to spend it for you?’

‘My first scheme is to supply pepper to all the families who live on bread and turnips.’

‘And you might give them a book that I heard of somewhere, written by somebody,’ said Mrs. Pierrepont, ‘with directions for cooking turnips in fifty different ways.’

‘You have not told me yet, uncle, who has been kind enough to leave me all this money.’

‘It comes to you indirectly from your grandfather, but you only inherit it through the unexpected death of your cousins—the Scott-Erskines.’

‘Are they dead? Poor children! I never saw them, but they were the only cousins I had. Now I have no one in the world belonging to me.’

‘Present company excepted,’ said her aunt.

‘I belong to you, Aunt Caroline, not you to me.’

‘They died of scarlatina,’ continued Mr. Pierrepont, ‘at their grandmother’s house in Warwickshire. Lewis received information of their death, and of the fact that you were next in succession, and was on his way here with the news when I met him.’

‘I think Mrs. Ross might have let us know,’ said Mrs. Pierrepont. ‘I consider it great remissness on her part.’

‘We never corresponded,’ said Gabrielle, ‘so I suppose she thought we should not care.’

‘Well, it relieves one of the necessity of putting on mourning,’ observed Mrs. Pierrepont, complacently, ‘which would have been particularly inconvenient just now.’

‘I shall put it on,’ said Gabrielle.

‘O! nonsense, Gabrielle—I won’t hear of such a thing; if you do I must, and it never suits me.’

‘My first cousins,’ said Gabrielle, shortly; ‘I have no option.’

‘But, Gabrielle, think of my lovely new dresses! They will be quite old-fashioned and out of season in three months’ time.’

‘Well, Aunt Carry, I will give you the most splendid black velvet dress that can be bought for money, out of this fortune of mine, and a set of coral ornaments to wear with it.’

‘Thank you, my dear; and you know mauve and violet and scarlet are all mourning; and after all, we never saw the poor things.’

‘We shall receive further particulars from Lewis in a day or two,’ said Mr. Pierrepont. ‘Go and dream of your good fortune, Gabrielle, and build as many castles in the air as you like. I give you free leave.’

‘Provided I people them with gouty dukes and reprobate marquises. If you really saw one of my airy castles, uncle, you would only pray that it might take to itself wings and fly away.’

‘Well, my dear, I suppose all young girls have to sow the wild oats of their own romance and sentimentality before they become useful members of society. Happily, it is a crop that seldom results in a harvest.’

‘Is that true?’ said Gabrielle, thoughtfully; and her fixed gaze told that she had wandered off into a reverie, pursuing the train of thought awakened by her uncle’s words. ‘Is that true?’ she repeated to herself, as she slowly ascended the stairs to her own sitting-room. ‘Are all my dreams, all my hopes, to end in an existence such as my aunt’s? Will they never bring forth a harvest? Are my visions of real nobility and greatness of soul to end in an old man and a gouty foot? Never! And yet I have lived so long in this fashionable world that I sometimes feel tempted to think there is no other. Shall I begin to yield at last to the “water for ever a-dropping?” or will Providence open out to me a way of

escape? If they could but know the state of my mind!—and yet it would not scare them. Would anything scare them? Yes, if I married beneath me, and introduced a Moggins or Scroggins into the family. Nothing else, I verily believe.

CHAPTER II.

I have not loved the world, nor the world me,—
 But let us part fair foes : I do believe,
 Though I have found them not, that there may be
 Words which are things,—hopes which will not deceive,
 And virtues which are merciful, nor weave
 Snares for the failing : I would also deem
 O'er others' griefs that some sincerely grieve ;
 That two, or one, are almost what they seem,—
 That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream.

Childe Harold.

GABRIELLE's sitting-room opened out of her bed-room, having been originally intended for a dressing-room. It was as pleasant an apartment as a town house could afford ; the furniture in no way remarkable, but flowers, books, pictures, and articles of taste abounded in such profusion ; that the mere stowing away of her property in so limited a space cost Gabrielle some trouble and ingenuity.

She seated herself in the chair she had left when her uncle sent for her, and tried to go on with the novel she was reading, but her interest in the story, if ever she felt any, was gone ; and she again fell into the unsatisfactory train of thought which her uncle's last speech had awakened. At the sound of a light tap upon the door, she put aside the book and said ' Come in ' with an appearance of relief.

' O Emma ! is it you ? Is Uncle Henry downstairs ? Sit down and take off your hat.'

The young lady who entered the room had few points of resemblance to her cousin. Emma Mostyn, with good features, dark hair, and brilliant complexion, fell short of beauty through a total absence of expression. Her small sparkling black eye was unsoftened by any graceful sweep of eyebrow or fringe of eyelash. Her manners were self-possessed without natural ease, and there was a precision about her carriage, gestures, and speech, that sat stiffly on so young a person.

‘Good afternoon, dear Gabrielle; papa is downstairs, and he begged me not to keep him waiting more than a quarter of an hour, so it is hardly worth while to take off my hat at the risk of disarranging my hair. Of course you are going to Sir John Vivian’s to-night?’

‘Yes, we are going, and to a dinner party besides, I believe. No one can say we don’t work hard.’

‘When do you leave town?’

‘In about a fortnight; but we don’t gain much by that, for we go to Brighton, and of the two, Brighton is even harder work than this. Do you ever wish to get away from people, Emma?’

‘Disagreeable people—often.’

‘All people—disagreeable and agreeable—the agreeable ones most, I think. I can hardly fancy what it would be like to live in a place where one might walk half a mile without the probability of meeting anybody.’

‘Very unpleasant, I should say.’

‘Then you are not surfeited as I am. I sometimes feel as if I would give the world to be alone with mountains and valleys, and away from people. I sometimes wonder whether there are any places still left in England where you could spend an hour without being disturbed by the sight of a human face, or the sound of a railway whistle. I could almost fancy there were none.’

‘A lodge in some vast wilderness, where you might live “the world forgetting, by the world forgot,” and read “sermons in stones.” I feel quite guilty for

marring this sublime loneliness of yours with the sight of my human face. I suspect you have been reading too much poetry lately.'

'Better for me if I had. I never feel in the mood for reading anything but novels now, and I despair of ever again getting excited over the fate of hero or heroine. They always make it up and marry at the end of the third volume, or if they don't they die, and that is an imposition. I wish people in books would do something they don't do in real life.'

'Is there anything people don't do in real life? Perhaps it would create a variety if the hero danced on a tight rope like Blondin.'

'No variety at all; we all dance on the tight rope of public opinion, where a swerve to right or left would launch one into infinite space.'

'You are growing cynical. You ought to go into the country.'

'That is just where I never do go.'

'Surely at Headworthy' —

'What kind of country do you call it half a mile from a garrison town? Even at Headworthy there is no getting away from "people"—the house is always full of visitors.'

'Well, I have no more suggestions to make. We called on the Murrays on our way here. Mr. Dacre was sitting with them. I wonder whether he really means to propose for Amelia. Two more daughters are to be introduced next year—twins: fancy, five daughters out at once, and all on hand! It must be frightful to belong to such a family. I came away congratulating myself that I was not one of fourteen.'

'I wish I were.'

'Absurd! I fancy I see you with six or eight great tearing brothers—stitching, and darning, and contriving from morning till night.'

'I should have thirteen brothers and sisters to care for.'

'To slave for, you mean. It appears to me that you are in a very dissatisfied frame of mind to-day. Is anything the matter?'

'Nothing at all; I am often in this frame of mind, only you don't happen to come across me. I had no idea any one could feel so listless and weary at twenty as I do. I know it sounds like affectation, but you ought to know me too well to suspect me of being affected.'

'Not affected, dear Gabrielle, but a little odd.'

'Yes, I know you always thought me odd. Perhaps I am, but at all events I am careful not to parade my oddness in society. I take care not to lose my balance on the tight rope. Now, Emma, listen to me. It may do me good to state my case, and it can do you no harm to hear it, though I don't think you are likely to "minister to a mind diseased." You know pretty well what my life is here and at Headworthy. I have led this kind of life, with but one exception of three short months, ever since I was nine years old. Although I had a governess, I was always in the drawing-room. It pleased Aunt Caroline to take me about with her, and to dress me in every new thing that struck her fancy. I never had a girlhood like some girls. Before I had left off playing with dolls, I had heard so much about flirtations, and marriages, and balls, and about introductions and presentations, and such matters, that my dolls used to make offers to one another, and drive off in a carriage-and-six, instead of saying lessons and giving tea-parties, like most well-behaved dolls. When we were not in London we were at Headworthy, with a house full of visitors; and when we were neither here nor there we were at Brighton, in a round of visiting; or if further change was needed, we went to Paris. This has gone on for twelve years, and the only glimpse of country life I have had, except from the railway carriage, was when I spent three months at Heidelberg, five years ago. I sometimes fancy all England may be divided into city and suburb; and as for the "lodge in some vast wilderness," you must go to a Canadian forest or an American prairie to find it. Really, if it were not for recollections of very early childhood, I should have no knowledge of country life except from books, but

unluckily I can remember quite enough of its sweetness and delicious freedom to keep me from feeling contented in this dreary turmoil. There—I have done: what do you think of the song of the imprisoned skylark?’

‘It think it very fine—very fine indeed. I wish I could sing half as well. It was almost poetry. You should write it out to send it to a magazine. Are you angry, Gabrielle?’

‘Not at all; only sorry for you. I knew how it would be before I began, only I wanted to give vent to it, and some sort of audience was desirable. I believe a lay figure would have done just as well. I don’t suppose you ever closed your eyes over a violet in your life?’

‘I never did; is that a test of being spirituelle? does it look the better for it?’

‘I doubt if you would discover any difference. Well, now let us talk of something else. I heard from Cecilia Tudor this morning.’

‘That elderly maiden cousin of yours! Where is she living now?’

‘She has not left St. Leonards yet, but she finds the place so changed to her since her sister’s death, that she wishes to find a home elsewhere. They were so fond of each other, and Cecilia looked up so much to Barbara, that I cannot picture her left alone with no one to wait upon or be advised by.’

‘She is a nice person, is she not? I never saw her. I don’t think, as a rule, maiden ladies of a certain age are interesting.’

‘She is an exception, and I am very fond of her. The cousinship is so far off that it could be as easily dropped as acknowledged, but I love her for herself, and I wish I could ask her to come and stay with me, but I know Aunt Caroline’s hours would distract her.’

‘Are you engaged for any of the dances to-night?’

‘A few.’

‘Do you know whether the Bushbys and Garnetts

and Arkwrights are to be there? Really, Gabrielle, you are past blushing! How hard and world-worn you are getting!’

‘As I told you. I think they will all be there. Why were you not at the Rolfses’ last week?’

‘We were engaged to the Lloyds, and papa would not go to both. I heard you had a pleasant evening. Which of the Rolfses do you like best?’

‘I like them both.’

‘The younger one is the more agreeable. His brother is rather apt to hold one at arm’s length. Not so Mr. Bushby; if I envy you anything, it is your conquest of him. He is the most lively, entertaining man I have met this season. When is it to be?’

“‘To be or not to be; that is the question,’” said Gabrielle, coolly.

‘Well, to be sure he is said to be a great flirt. I don’t suppose I shall get anything out of you in your present mood; so I will say good-bye. I have been with you fourteen minutes, which allows me one minute for descending, when I shall find papa pulling his watch out of his pocket. Put on your rose-coloured spectacles before we meet this evening, or you will be dull company.’

‘I will come down to speak to Uncle Henry.’

Colonel Mostyn had seen considerable service in India. He was of commanding height, with the peculiar gait of a cavalry officer. In point of feature he might have been thought still handsome, but a cynical turn of mind had imparted an unamiable expression to his face, and those who knew him best thought his countenance in no way belied his character. He was never known to express or evince attachment for any human being except his daughter, and appeared to be equally void of local affection. Gabrielle had never been fond of Colonel Mostyn, who was her uncle only by marriage, and there had never been any real sympathy between Emma and herself; but a tolerably good understanding and some degree of intimacy had always existed between them, and for the sake of the dead

mother, whose memory was dear to her child, she wished this to continue to be the case.

'Well, Gabrielle, how are you? I am glad to see you to offer my congratulations upon your good fortune.'

'What good fortune?' asked Emma, in some surprise.

'Hasn't Gabrielle told you?' said Mrs. Pierrepont. 'We heard this morning that she was heiress to a very considerable fortune, through the death of her cousins.'

'Fancy your not telling me, Gabrielle!'

'I had forgotten it,' said Gabrielle, 'at least, I did not think of it;' and she turned aside, disagreeably conscious of the incredulous smile with which her uncle resorted to the caressing of his moustache, as was his wont when good breeding forbade him to utter that which was in his mind.

'Well, I think at least it should have had the effect of making you more amiable,' said Emma. 'I wish almonds would come to people who had teeth to enjoy them.'

'Perhaps they are bitter almonds.'

'Only in the sense in which grapes are sour. But of course an heiress can afford to take up this superb tone of indifference. It sounds so much better than to be elated at a sordid piece of good fortune.'

'Yes,' said Colonel Mostyn, with a grim playfulness. 'A little trifling with the shadow won't interfere with the enjoyment of the substance. Gabrielle will be quite a prize now: happy those whom this good fortune finds already at her feet!'

Gabrielle's colour had risen somewhat during this conversation, but she exhibited no outward token of annoyance.

'We have heard no particulars yet,' she observed. 'Fortunes seldom turn out so large as report represents them, and after all some other claimant may come forward.'

'Not likely, my dear Gabrielle,' exclaimed her aunt; 'you may be sure Mr. Lewis is well informed; and as

to another claimant, you are the only direct descendant of your grandfather; so the matter does not admit of a doubt.'

'Poor Gabrielle!' said Emma, in a playful tone, not untinged by satire. 'I fear there is no escape; you will be branded as an heiress, whether you will or no.'

'I will retract my congratulations, and offer my sincere condolences,' said Colonel Mostyn, in the same tone. 'Now, Emma, say goodbye to your cousin; it is four o'clock.'

Mrs. Pierrepont's carriage was also waiting, and Gabrielle presently found herself in the drawing-room alone. She paced the room in restlessness and dissatisfaction for some time, and gave vent to the thoughts that were troubling her. 'Am I a humbug? I felt as if I was all the time they were here; when I saw Emma and Uncle Henry exchange glances, and Uncle Henry pull his moustache. I wonder whether I am a humbug! I don't think I am; but then, people hardly ever know themselves. I don't feel as if I cared anything about this money, but I think I must care, because they all seem to believe that I do. I wonder whether I deceive myself, whether, after all, I am only a sham. Almost everyone about me appears to be unreal, and it is hardly likely that I should be the only real one amongst so many. I only know one person free from all unreality, and even of him I have lately begun to feel the shadow of a doubt. As for myself, I hardly know the true from the false. I am afraid to believe in myself. To be sure, it would not cause me a pang at this moment if I heard some one else had a better right to this property than myself. But then everyone would pity me, and think I must be disappointed, until at last I should begin to think that I was disappointed without knowing it. O! how hard life is to understand! If I could only break through this present mode of life! I must soon, or something dreadful will happen to my head or heart. They are both quite wrong. I cannot trust my own estimate of anything. Sometimes, when I have looked at the sun intently for several seconds, I

have found that for several minutes afterwards I could see nothing but suns—bright suns, dark suns, red, yellow, green suns, met my gaze everywhere: instead of trees and grass, I saw only suns. Now this is just the state of my mind. I have gazed upon one phase of society until I have blinded myself to all others. On whichever side I turn, I see only hollow etiquette and shallow politeness. The emptiness and uselessness of my own life stamps itself wherever I turn my eyes; and possibly, where truth and sincerity still exist, I take them for the wretched counterfeit. It appears to me that every one I meet is cast in the same, or almost the same, mould; that there is no strength of character or individuality left. Of course I know this cannot be the case; I have learnt to think so, because in a life like mine we only skim the surface of society, and there is no possibility of breaking through the outer crust of politeness and good manners. To others I appear the same vapid creature that they appear to me; yet I hope within myself that I am not this, and so perhaps they are not that. And this brings me back to my first question—Am I an exception to the general rule, or am I only an impostor?

With these reflections she returned to her own room, and endeavoured to proceed with the book she had laid aside on her cousin's entrance; but her interest in the tale, if ever she felt any, had evaporated, and tossing it aside with an impatient gesture, she leaned her head on her hand, and was soon lost in deep thought. An expression of sadness deepened on her countenance, and more than once she drew the long sigh of one whose heart was oppressed with care. At length—as though seized by a sudden resolve—she abruptly rose, turned the key in the lock, and seating herself at the table, drew towards her a writing case, and began slowly, and with much laboured consideration, to write the following letter:—

‘I have at length resolved to break the silence that has hitherto existed between us. It has become absolutely necessary to me to speak on the subject of which

you are cognisant to some one, and to whom can I dare do so but to you? You, and you alone, are aware of the pledge that fetters my spirit. I would beggar myself to-morrow to feel once more free. A bracelet may be worn with pleasure, but manacles press upon heart and soul. I hope I am not saying what is wrong. I would not willingly give you pain, but I feel so confident that you must think as I do upon this point, that I write openly and without reserve. Oh! how could one, whose memory I still hold dear, deliberately cloud existences that might have been so joyous! And here let me, in justice to myself, say one word in extenuation of my conduct on that day. I was a child. I acted without thought, without premeditation. The impulse of the moment swayed me, no prudential considerations had ever entered my thoughts. God forbid they ever should find place in the mind of a child, such as I was then. Since that time I have learned much, and all that I have learned has deepened my regret, and added to my shame. I pray you now to forgive the act that must so often have brought upon you pain and disappointment, and pardon one who acted in blind obedience, without a thought of consequences. And now, can nothing be done? I know not how to bear the weight of this secret any longer. Every day makes it more and more insupportable to me. Reserve of any kind is offensive, and I have learned to think it may become sinful. Surely you must have felt it to be so, and you will admit that, on many accounts, it is worse for a woman than for a man. I have heard you spoken of as good and noble; I know you were so in former days. Surely you will now take steps to relieve a burthened heart—surely if relief is to be found you will find it. Even this outlet for feelings that have been pent up for so long has brought a kind of refreshment. What would it be to feel once more free? I beseech you to send me a few lines to ease, if possible, the weight that lies upon my spirit, and believe me to remain,

‘Yours sincerely, but sorrowfully,

‘GABRIELLE.’

Having written this letter she enclosed it in an envelope, and addressed it to 'Captain Kearney, —th Hussars, Curragh Camp, near Dublin.'

She then donned her walking-attire, and herself carried it to the nearest pillar-post. But even when the letter was posted her spirits did not appear to be materially improved, for there was no tinge of colour in her cheeks, and her aspect was even more listless than before. She returned to her room, sent for a cup of tea, and once more tried to drown thought in the pages of a novel, until it was time to dress for the evening's engagements.

'You do me no credit, Gabrielle, with those pale cheeks,' observed Mrs. Pierrepont, as she took her usual survey of her niece's toilet, before descending to the carriage. 'What possessed you, my dear, that you should have put on white to-night? Pink is far more becoming when you are paler than usual.'

'Holford arranged my dress,' said Gabrielle, absently.

A few days later Mr. Pierrepont passed a letter to his niece at the breakfast-table, endorsed in the free, well-formed handwriting which is the exclusive heritage of an English gentleman of education.

'I don't know who your correspondent may be, Gabrielle, but he writes a good hand, and owns an imposing crest. Possibly the duke has resolved not to let the grass grow beneath his feet. In such a case, let us have early information.'

Mrs. Pierrepont looked up with eager curiosity, and certainly Gabrielle's heightened colour, and the mysterious reserve with which she placed the letter in her pocket, without even a glance at handwriting or seal, afforded sufficient ground for suspicion. But Mrs. Pierrepont knew by experience that Gabrielle's mysteries were not to be wrested from her, and having indulged in a little good-humoured bantering, she permitted her niece to depart with her letter to the safe privacy of her own room.

Once there, she locked the door, and drew the letter from her pocket; but then her heart failed her. Her cheeks were white and trembling, her hand shook, and her

breath came short and quick, as she examined the handwriting and the seal, unable to summon resolution to break it open. For some moments she paused, then, ashamed of her own weakness, hastily opened it, and read the contents slowly and deliberately, the throbbing of her pulses alone betraying her agitation.

‘I have just received your letter, and from my heart do I thank you for writing. But for the promise extracted from me, I could not have allowed these long years to pass without intercourse of some kind. Yet there is much in your letter which I find very painful. You seek relief at my hands, but I fear the species of relief you seek is not such as I am at present prepared to give. Indeed, I do not consider that it is in my power to bestow it. The fact must always remain a fact, that we are mutually bound, at all events till a certain date, by a pledge which may have been taken in haste, may have been taken in ignorance, but was undeniably taken by both of us. But why regard that as an unmitigated evil which has not yet proved itself evil in any degree? Has the memory of the past no longer power to soothe? Has the hope of the future no longer power to sustain? It is not so with me. The necessity for deception is much to be deplored, I frankly confess; it may in itself be even sinful; but the necessity was laid upon us by one to whose opinion we deferred, before we were capable of regarding this matter from the point of view of a more matured judgment. Since, then, a promise was given, and you have already borne up bravely for more than four years, I am disposed to think that it is better to carry out the original engagement, and submit to your chains for a few months longer, even though they may rub a little at times. I will not even admit the thought that there can be any reason, not acknowledged, for the tone of deep depression in which you write. Were this the case, I am sure you are too candid not to have said so plainly. Believe me that, while I cannot altogether sympathise with you, I yet feel sincerely grieved at the state of depression under which you are suffering, and would fain alleviate

it, had I the power of doing so. Remember, that in spite of long absence, and cessation of all intercourse, you are still constantly in the thoughts of

‘Yours,

‘FRANK KEARNEY.’

Gabrielle folded up the letter, and whatever effect it produced on her mind was known only to herself. She did not reply to it, and her cheek remained pale as before, and the ceaseless round of gaiety failed to dispel her general depression of tone and manner.

A few days proved that Mr. Lewis’s information had been correct, and that Gabrielle was heiress to her grandfather’s wealth. Her uncle and aunt were provoked at the listlessness with which she received the news, and even when a statement of her newly-acquired property was placed in her hands, some days elapsed before she roused herself to the exertion of studying it. Nevertheless this want of interest was not destined to continue for ever.

‘Uncle,’ she observed, one morning, at breakfast, ‘do you know that my grandfather left an estate?’

‘Lewis told me there were a few acres of moorland and bog somewhere at the end of the world,’ said Mr. Pierrepont, carelessly, without laying down his paper.

‘Uncle; put away the “Times” for a few minutes. I have something to say to you. My grandfather was very fond of this property. He built a house upon it, and named it “Heatherbrae.”’

‘An Irish cabin, where the cottar lived rent free, on condition he reclaimed the soil,’ suggested Mr. Pierrepont.

‘You are quite wrong. He built a good house, and lived in it himself, for some years before he died. He also built a Church in the neighbourhood. He took the greatest interest in reclaiming and planting the property, and was very fond of it—at least, so it appears. This place now belongs to me.’

‘Then sell it at once. The keeping it up is a tax upon the estate, and the land is never likely to increase in value.’

'I am not going to sell it. I am going to live on it.'

'Really! how romantic! Do you expect us to accompany you?'

'No, not at present. I shall send you an invitation as soon as I can make you comfortable. But, though you smile, I am quite in earnest. This is the very thing I have been longing for, though I was not aware of it before it came.'

'Probably not.'

'You are only trying to make fun of us, Gabrielle,' said Mrs. Pierrepont, uneasily.

'Indeed I am not, Aunt Carry. I have quite made up my mind to go and live at Heatherbrae. I have thought of it all night, and made my plans. The very idea has put new life into me.'

'Well, let us hear your plans,' said her uncle, willing that her sudden fit of romance should spend itself.

'I am going to live on my own soil and be a Lady Bountiful to the neighbourhood,' said Gabrielle. 'I intend to carry on my grandfather's work, and reclaim the land, and do some little good to the rough people around. The house must be a substantial one, to judge from the money spent upon it, and there is something said about gardens and shrubberies.'

'And since we are not included in your plans, I conclude some one else is, and that this part of your scheme has still to be broken to us.'

'Yes, some one else is,' replied Gabrielle, not abashed.

'I am going to ask Cecilia Tudor to be my companion and chaperone. She has no settled home, and no one whom she cares more about than she does about me. I thought it over last night, and I don't believe she will refuse me.'

'Well, Gabrielle, you are old enough to make your own plans, only I stipulate that you spend Christmas at Headworthy.'

'You expect me to be weary of my freak by that time; but I don't think I shall. However, we need not talk of Christmas at present—it is some way off.'

'And where is your country seat?'

'Heatherbrae is about two miles from Kettlebury.'

'Indeed! And—pray do not be offended—where may Kettlebury be?'

'Kettlebury is two miles from Kettlebury Road, on the ——— railway, and Kettlebury Common is two miles from Kettlebury, and Heatherbrae is in the midst of Kettlebury Common.'

'It must be the house that Jack built,' observed Mrs. Pierrepont.

'So it is,' said Gabrielle, gaily, 'and I am the maiden all forlorn.'

'Don't take up with the man all tattered and torn,' said her uncle. 'On second thoughts, Gabrielle, I don't at all like your carrying out this madcap scheme without any competent person to take care of you. You may be going amongst a set of ruffians, who for the sake of your purse would knock you on the head without compunction.'

'You forget that my grandfather lived and died amongst them.'

'My fear is that you may do the same. As for Miss Tudor—what protection would an elderly, timid and nervous maiden lady be to you? It is a wild scheme.'

'Very wild and utterly impracticable,' said Mrs. Pierrepont, shortly. 'You must give it up, dear Gabrielle.'

'Not for the world!' said Gabrielle, with an impetuosity that startled her uncle and aunt. 'I feel as if Providence had dropped it at my feet. Uncle, I can't enter now into half the reasons that make this prospect so delightful to me, but give it up I can't and won't: with all deference and affection, and desire to oblige you, I can't and won't, dear uncle.'

'Wilfu' woman!' said her uncle, easily—

'When a woman says she will,
She will, you may depend on 't;
And when a woman says she won't,
She won't—so there's an end on 't!'

'There's an end on't!!' repeated Gabrielle, merrily;

and the sudden accession of lightheartedness and mirth to an aspect that had been latterly so listless and drooping, went far to reconcile Mr. Pierrepont to a scheme otherwise distasteful.

‘But it is one woman’s “won’t” to another woman’s “will,”’ said Mrs. Pierrepont, plaintively. ‘You surely have some consideration for me.’

‘In the main, but not in this particular instance, Aunt Caroline. You have often wished me to have the rosy tint of a country girl, and the good spirits I used to have. Now I am going in search of them, and when I bring them back you must say that I consider your wishes in a dutiful manner.’

‘Who is to be my companion while you are away?’

‘As soon as you actually begin to find me wanting you must invite Alice or Carry Pierrepont, but at present I don’t anticipate such a contingency.’

‘You are very unkind, Gabrielle.’

‘I don’t mean to be unkind,’ said Gabrielle, thoughtfully, struck by a tone of feeling for which she was not prepared. ‘I only meant that I thought you would hardly miss me. It is not as if we lived a retired life and were much together.’

‘Think how dull the breakfast-table will be without you,’ said Mrs. Pierrepont, ‘and I shall have no one to take about with me. Married ladies are not half welcome unless they are accompanied by young and pretty girls.’

‘You must invite Alice Pierrepont,’ reiterated Gabrielle, whose fit of compunction was healed by this speech. ‘You leave town for Brighton in ten days, remember, and at Headworthy the house is always so full that one more or less cannot signify.’

Mrs. Pierrepont appeared silenced, if not convinced, and the conversation ended.

CHAPTER III.

My father left a park to me,
But it is wild and barren ;
A garden too with scarce a tree,
And waster than a warren :
Yet say the neighbours when they call,
It is not bad but good land,
And in it is the germ of all
That grows within the woodland.

And I must work thro' months of toil,
And years of cultivation,
Upon my proper patch of soil
To grow my own plantation.
I'll take the showers as they fall,
I will not vex my bosom :
Enough if at the end of all
A little garden blossom.—*Tennyson.*

GABRIELLE was allowed to proceed with her plans regarding Heatherbrae without further opposition. Mr. Pierrepont advised his wife not to oppose schemes which she had no power to forbid, and assured her that a few weeks of voluntary exile from the society she had been accustomed to move in, would more effectually cure Gabrielle of her passion for pastoral life, than the most strenuous opposition from her relatives.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Pierrepont had ever arrived at a true estimation of their niece's character. A nature like hers could never content itself with the shallow waters of fashionable life, being fully conscious of the cool and crystal depths, with their stores of hid treasure, which lay beneath that surface ripple, and which no seeker ever sought in vain. Not all the unreality and frivolity of her outward life could deprive her of the constantly increasing conviction that life was nevertheless worth the living, nor dishearten her in her endeavours to solve the problem—in what true life consisted. Her present schemes, therefore, had been formed

less for the indulgence of her love for country life, than in the hope that, far from men and cities, her balance of mind might be restored, that she might be better able to distinguish between right and wrong, and decide upon the course of life most likely to bring to her contentment and peace.

Her preparations were commenced with all the energy natural to her character, and no difficulties presented themselves which could not be overcome by money and a resolute will. But her aunt was not a little astonished, on paying her a visit in her own room the evening before her departure, to find that those preparations were being made on an extensive scale.

‘Why, Gabrielle! I had no idea you were going to take all your books and pictures and knick-knacks with you—the room looks quite deserted. What could make you think of such a thing?’

‘I shall be glad of books in the country, and you know even when we go to Headworthy I take many of these things with me.’

‘But it looks so like a real departure!’

‘It is a real departure from town for many months, at all events,’ said Gabrielle. ‘Remember you will not be here again yourselves until February, and winter is so disagreeable in London that you must not expect me then.’

‘It will be ten times more disagreeable in the country. I declare you make me feel quite unsettled, and I don’t understand anything about your plans. Just imagine how damp this old place you are going to must be! I dare say there are mushrooms under the beds, and lizards running up the walls.’

‘Now, Aunt Carry, I have a great deal to say to you,’ said Gabrielle, laughing. ‘Sit down in this chair, if you can contrive to scramble over those great boxes. There—you had better make yourself comfortable, because you are likely to be there for some time.’

‘I never feel as if I had a will of my own when I am with you, Gabrielle.’

‘You resign yourself with a very good grace, I admit.

Now, first of all, let me set your mind at rest about the toadstools and tadpoles. Every room at Heatherbrae has been in the full enjoyment of a roaring fire day and night for ten days past, and the furniture of the house, which is not very abundant, has had the benefit of it. Secondly, it is not an old house, but nearly a new one; and a very substantial and picturesque brick building. You may remember that you have often told me that brick houses are the driest to live in.'

'Not if they are built in a bog.'

'If you were a little wiser about derivations, Aunt Carry, you would know that brae meant the side of a hill, while bogs prefer the bottom. Heatherbrae, as I am told, stands on high, healthy, breezy moorland, some thousand feet above the bed of the Kettle—supposing that to be the name of the river.'

Mrs. Pierrepont shivered. 'I would as soon go to Archangel.'

'Cecilia arrived in town to-day,' continued Gabrielle, 'and is sleeping at a friend's house, where I shall call for her to-morrow on my way to the station. She has thrown herself very kindly into my plans, and is so staid and good that you could not wish me to be under the care of a more prudent duenna.'

'Under the care!' repeated Mrs. Pierrepont, derisively. 'As if you were not going to take poor quiet Miss Tudor under your protection! As if she would venture to lift a finger without your gracious permission. No, she will do for the shadow of the thing, and that is all.'

'The shadow of the thing is all I need,' said Gabrielle, with dignity. 'The thing itself—propriety and self-respect—I carry with me.'

'So you do—I willingly admit.'

'But it happens that I am likely to have a much more formidable mentor than dear gentle Cecilia. When Emma came to see me, a day or two ago, I asked her, in simple jest, whether she and Uncle Henry would like to share my retirement. The possibility of her taking it in earnest I never contemplated. But this morning, to my utter amazement, I received a note

from her, saying that they had been thinking over my proposal, and should like very much to pay me a visit.'

'My dear, heiresses never lack friends,' said Mrs. Pierrepont, with a satirical laugh.

'I suppose an autumn holiday free of expense has its charms,' said Gabrielle, quietly; 'but it has slightly disarranged my plans. I think Uncle Henry is very nearly the last person I should have preferred for my first visitor; but I have told him he must be prepared for a rough welcome, and after all I have only myself to thank for it.'

'He will die of ague before he has been there a week.'

'More likely to die of ennui. Between ourselves, my chief concern is for Holford. I can't think how she will comport herself among rustics.'

'She will leave at the end of a month.'

'So much the better. I never cared much for the grand dame you engaged for me, Aunt Carry, and I will set about learning to do my own hair at once. I wish she was not going with me. I am afraid she will be terribly in the way.'

'What have you done about other servants? Has Mr. Lewis procured you a coachman and footman?'

'No, truly; I would as soon stay here. I mean to depend entirely upon native talent. Now let me show you some of my wardrobe. Here is a useful hat.'

'A perfect fright!'

'And here are boots; thumpers or stumpers or clumpers, whatever they are called. You see I am not going to carry the fine lady into the country.'

'So I see, indeed.'

'And here is a useful dress and jacket, and exceedingly pretty too. The rest is packed. Now, Aunt Caroline, I have something to ask you. I have often wished, but half dreaded, to do so, but I can't go away without having spoken.' Gabrielle paused for a moment in pain and hesitation, and then said, 'Will you tell me about my father?'

Mrs. Pierrepont also hesitated; 'What can I tell you that you do not know already?'

'I know nothing, or next to nothing, but I have gathered uncomfortable impressions, and that being the case, I am sure I had better know the truth, for I am no longer a child.'

'I don't know what to tell,' said Mrs. Pierrepont. 'If you ask me questions I will answer them, but, for my own part, I think bygones had better be bygones.'

'That might be true if I had never heard anything; but in a case of this sort, I am almost sure to imagine worse than the truth. Were my father and mother unhappy?'

'Who could have told you so?'

'I gathered it from some of my mother's letters. I gathered more than that. I thought—O Aunt Caroline—I thought he must have broken my mother's heart!' and Gabrielle's voice quivered with feeling.

'No, Gabrielle—no, indeed—it was not so bad as that. They said so—some of her family—they tried to make it out so; but she was naturally delicate. I never remember her strong, and although sorrow may have prostrated her, and made her susceptible of infection, she would not have died if she had not persisted in nursing her sister, who was in a rapid decline.'

'Did he care?'

'I hardly know—yes, I think he seemed to care. When she was gone, and he came here to tell me, he seemed sorrowful and subdued; but I cannot say how long it lasted. You were an infant then. He went away—somewhere or other—and I never saw him again. He sent for you, if you remember, when you were sixteen, and you spent three months with him at Heidelberg; so that, after all, in one way, you know more about him than I do.'

'I knew nothing of him—he was like a stranger to me. Whatever his mode of life was, it was one that took him away from his home, and I should have been very lonely but for—some one I knew there. He seemed fond of me, but I think he was glad when you

wrote and asked to have me back. Did he ever marry again ?'

'I believe not. Gabrielle, you must not question me too closely. He was a great deal in Scotland, but we never heard any actual particulars—and such things are better forgotten. He was abroad at the time of his death.'

'Describe him to me—I cannot trust my own recollections. Was he repulsive looking ?'

'Quite the reverse—a singularly handsome, well-grown man. Perhaps if he had been less attractive in appearance and less pleasing in manner, it might have been happier for him and for us. He was many years older than I was, remember, and where the mothers are not the same, the children are seldom so deeply attached. Still, we were fond of each other, and when he married we received his wife most cordially ; indeed, we could not have done otherwise, for no marriage could have been more acceptable.'

'Tell me something of my mother.'

'You know already that she was well born, and pleasing in appearance. She was also refined and well educated, and they might have been very happy if my brother had been less fond of society. Your mother loved home and country pleasures, and your father loved a gay life. Well—they were not happy together—that is the simple truth of the matter. To enter into particulars can do no good now.'

'But was she very unhappy ? Was he cruel to her ?'

Mrs. Pierrepont hesitated. 'He neglected her—that was his cruelty. I dare say she was very unhappy, especially as she lost two children—sweet children—your brothers. From one cause and another sorrow told upon her health. She grew thin and pale and lost her spirits. Then her sister returned from India in ill-health, and your mother went and nursed her. She died of decline, and afterwards your mother seemed to be infected with the same complaint. You have heard all this before.'

'Yes,' and Gabrielle's sorrowful abstracted look told

that her thoughts were wandering among very sad recollections.

‘When your mother died you remained with your grandfather, Mr. Erskine, for some years. You were nine years old when your father brought you to me, thinking that at that age you needed a mother’s care. Poor child! how you cried! You cost me a little fortune in dolls and doll’s-houses before I could comfort you. Ah! that seems long, long ago now—and so best. I, for my part, never felt a desire to live any portion of my life over again. And now, Gabrielle, I should certainly advise you to drive away melancholy thoughts. You will never be younger, my dear, and youth is the time for lightheartedness and gaiety. I hope this freak of yours, absurd as it is, may just do so much good as to bring you back to us with roses in your cheeks, and with new relish for the enjoyments of life. Remember, you can come back at any moment when the fit leaves you, and heartily glad I shall be to see you return.’

‘Thank you, Aunt Carry—thank you for all things—this twelve years’ home, and your kindness to me, and for being sorry to part with me now . . .’

‘O Gabrielle! don’t say such things! It sounds like a parting. I won’t have you look upon it as a parting. I always think a real parting strikes a year off one’s life. And where is the use? This is nothing but an autumn tour. You will be eating your Christmas dinner with us soon. How can that old place ever have been got ready for you in the time?’

‘Mr. Lewis arranged everything for me. Uncle John said I had better place it in his hands. But Heatherbrae has always been to some extent kept up. A woman—a kind of housekeeper—has lived in the house, and a gardener’s wages have been regularly paid. Depend upon it, it is far superior to what you imagine. My grandfather was a man of great taste.’

‘Yes, but as eccentric in his notions as yourself. The Erskines were all passionately fond of a country life.’

‘No wonder, then, that I have always felt like a bird

in a cage. O Aunt Carry! I detected that yawn! Now I will release you. You must say good-bye to me to-night, as I start very early in the morning.' 'No, I hate "good-bye," it ought to be struck out of the language. I shall only say "good night," and go to bed with the impression that we shall meet at breakfast-time. Good night, dear Gabrielle—*au revoir*—pleasant dreams!' and Mrs. Pierrepont flitted off lightly, congratulating herself that she had in no degree shortened the period of her natural life.

When she was gone, Gabrielle closed her door, and then seated herself on one of her large travelling-trunks, and fell into thought. She was not particularly attached to the house in Grosvenor Square. She had no very tender memories to link her affections to any portion of it; while the life she had been leading had still fewer charms for her. Even the uncle and aunt from whom she was parting were but dear as are ordinary uncles and aunts. But then she was leaving; and persons of her temperament cannot look around a room for the last time, or give a last embrace to a familiar face, or hear a neighbouring steeple peal forth its last chime, without feelings of deep thoughtfulness, and some tender and lingering regrets. The moralist tells us that 'there are few things not purely evil, of which we can say, without some emotion of uneasiness, *this is the last.*' And to some natures, though the home has been unendured by happy hours, uncheered by tender words, unsweetened by well-loved faces, it may yet be linked to the heart by the thoughts there indulged, the hopes we have cherished, the sorrows we have endured, and the prayers we have breathed.

Gabrielle's view of the step she was taking differed from her aunt's. She felt doubtful whether she should ever again sit in that spot, and regard herself as truly 'at home.' For twelve years she had submitted to the will of Providence in the choice of a home, and that at a period of life when twelve years appear as twenty. Now she was not unwilling to believe that the same Providence had found for her another home, more

suited to her character, in which she might be at liberty to remodel her life according to the views she had formed. She was not disposed to distrust herself. She knew she was giving up little of any permanent value in her present life, and she was earnestly desirous of benefiting herself and those around her in the new home which unexpected events had made hers. She believed her motives were pure, without analysing them very deeply, and having prayed that she might not be guilty of taking a false step, felt satisfied in her own mind that all was right, and then laid aside the burthen once for all.

CHAPTER IV.

Good night to the Season!—another
Will come with its trifles and toys,
And hurry away, like its brother,
In sunshine, and odour, and noise.
Will it come with a rose or a briar?
Will it come with a blessing or curse?
Will its bonnets be lower or higher?
Will its morals be better or worse?
Will it find me grown thinner or fatter,
Or fonder of wrong, or of right,
Or married or buried?—no matter;
Good night to the Season! good night!
Mackworth Praed.

THE promise of a fine day was welcome when Gabrielle awoke at an early hour the following morning. She breakfasted alone, having bid adieu to her uncle, as well as her aunt, on the previous evening, and by eight o'clock had left her uncle's house.

It was necessary to make a circuit of a mile or more in order to fetch her cousin, but she was glad to find Miss Tudor waiting for her arrival, albeit in a passage full of boxes, carpet-bags, bandboxes, baskets, and brown-paper parcels. She was an elderly lady, slight,

and of the middle height, with a countenance unquestionably plain, yet no less unquestionably pleasing. To describe wherein her plainness lay were an easy task, but it would be far more difficult to state what it was that rendered her face so pleasing. Cecilia Tudor was fallow complexioned, with small eyes of pale grey; a long upper lip and a tight mouth. Such a description sounds symptomatic of old-maidism and ill-humour; yet, though a little precise in her ways, a more loving, amiable, unselfish, and gentle-natured being never existed. Her voice was soft and agreeable, her carriage and movements unmistakably those of a lady, her speech hesitating and not fluent, yet pleasantly phrased and sincere.

The friends embraced each other with heartfelt affection. 'I must begin with an apology, dear Ella,' said Miss Tudor, 'not only for the number of my boxes and packages, but also for the live-stock I am encumbering you with. I could not leave Poppet and Sweetie behind. I felt certain your invitation included them also. Naughty Poppet! down, there's a good little doggie; they have both promised to be on their best behaviour.'

'O! I am delighted to see them,' said Gabrielle, 'and anything else belonging to you. I will take charge of Sweetie,' she added, holding out her hand for the canary-bird's cage, 'and you must be responsible for Poppet. Holford is in a cab just behind us, and will take up the luggage.'

'Well, dear Ella, and how are you?' asked Cecilia, when they had again moved off.

'Most wonderfully well,' said Gabrielle, joyously, 'and quite in raptures at bidding adieu to this dingy world. Cecilia, I am going to take you to the very end of the earth, and when once we get there it is not probable we shall ever come back again.'

'Don't say so; you make me feel like the fly that ventured up the winding stair. Are we to be entranced with enjoyment, or laid low with ague and malaria?'

You are as bad as Aunt Caroline! No one is ever

ill except in smoke-dried cities. You will be as rosy as a milkmaid in a few weeks.'

'Or, at all events, you will be, which is of far more importance. I can't say that you have any colour to spare now.'

'How should I have with late hours and incessant visiting? By the bye, I want you to tell me what are the orthodox country hours—real primitive hours, I mean. I fancy we ought to breakfast at seven—dine at twelve—tea at four—sup at seven—and retire at eight.'

'O Ella! I don't know what my poor system will be like at the end of a week. You might as well wind up a clock the wrong way. I hope the meals are not to be as primitive as the hours.'

'They are to be delicious! Bread and milk, or oat-meal-porridge, or butter-milk and potatoes, for breakfast. Broth for luncheon—clear broth with marigolds floating on the surface—boiled mutton and turnips for dinner, with syllabub afterwards ——'

'Poor Poppet! How shall you like the marigolds, Poppet? I had no idea you were inviting me to Heatherbrae, Ella, in order to try experiments upon me. I suppose if I don't like the butter-milk I may have something else.'

'I can't allow you to begin with insubordination. You must commence with thinking Heatherbrae Arcadia. As for Holford, she looks so starch and prim, so scandalised and resentful, it almost damps my spirits. I haven't felt so cheerful for years as I do to-day, so if I am a little absurd you must overlook it for once.'

'You can never be absurd in my eyes, dear Ella.'

'I do believe that is true. I always loved you for the blind trust you had in those you loved. If anything would make me good, it would be my friends thinking me so. I should be so ashamed of *taking them in*, as the saying is.'

'I have very few left in whom I can feel a blind trust,' said Miss Tudor, with moist eyes. 'I have no one nearer than you, and when your letter came I felt as if my work was carved out for me.'

'And so it was,' said Gabrielle, affectionately; 'just when I most needed a friend, Providence directed me to one able and willing to be the friend I needed. And I have changed my mind, and shall try all my experiments upon Poppet first, because we could get another Poppet, but I couldn't get another Cecilia.'

It was wonderfully refreshing to city eyes to pass out of the thick smoky atmosphere into the pure fresh country air, and watch the green fields and scattered villages, through which the course lay. Gabrielle felt disinclined to talk, and was not sorry to find her companion provided with some knitting, and to hear that Cecilia disliked conversing in a railway-carriage as much as she did herself. She sat with her gaze fixed on the distant landscape, and although an open book lay on her lap, not a line did she read that day save out of the book of nature, indulging herself in a succession of pleasant reveries, for which no mode of travelling is perhaps so propitious as a railway journey.

After mid-day, the character of the scenery through which they were passing changed considerably. Dead levels gave place to hill and valley, park and glade. The grass became greener, the foliage more luxuriant. It was as though a series of dissolving-views were passing before her: now a piece of bold foreground, a wooded fell, and a thatched cottage at the foot; now a distant view of fir-crested hills, and highly cultivated fields, or a vision of sunny meadows, and winding brooks fringed with willows, and an angler here and there basking in the sunshine.

Hour after hour slipped away, and she knew not how long she had been gazing dreamily on these pleasant scenes, when she was all at once roused by the sound of a name that had already become familiar in her ears—'Kettlebury Road!' She started up, seized Poppet in her arms, and succeeded in dragging Miss Tudor out of the carriage, without making her fully aware whether an accident had occurred, or whether this was merely a feature in the prearranged programme.

Gabrielle had never before travelled without being

accompanied by a gentleman on whom she could rely for protection. It was not without reason that she congratulated herself, when, the train having moved off, she found Holford and a quantity of luggage on the platform beside her. The first sensation of startled astonishment having passed away, she was able to raise a laugh at her own expense, and commiserate Cecilia for having trusted herself to such a competent escort.

Albeit a little flurried, her spirits were not affected, and the novelty of the situation seemed to inspire her with fresh energy. Few persons had alighted with her, and the station-master, evidently preinformed of her probable arrival, came forward to relieve her perplexity as to what she should do next.

'Your servant is here, Miss Hope,' he observed; and at the same moment a respectable elderly man, of the labouring class, attired in his Sunday clothes, stepped forward, and made a deep reverence, while his forefinger touched his forehead.

'Your servant, ma'am; if I may make so bold, ma'am, you're kindly welcome at Kettlebury.'

'Thank you,' said Gabrielle, well pleased with the greeting. 'I am very glad to find myself at Kettlebury; and quite prepared to like every person and everything connected with it. I suppose you are the gardener. I am glad you came to meet me. Have you a cab waiting, and some conveyance for the luggage?'

'I've the little carriage handy by, ma'am. I considered as how you'd find it more agreeable this pleasant weather, than to be boxed up in a Kettlebury fly. A sight of trouble I've had, to be sure, to get any sort of a beast to put into it; for you see, ma'am, when the master died the horses were sold, but the carriage, not wanting for to eat or to drink, was just put away in the coach-house.'

'And have you succeeded in finding some sort of a beast?' demanded Gabrielle, pleasantly.

'Well, ma'am, at last I perswa'ed of Jacob Green to let me have his Tim. A likely beast is Tim, and a rare one to go, if you give him a taste of the whip now and

then. Perhaps he's some'at rough to look at, but there's no more vice about Tim than about a tabby-cat, and he'll take you home very comfortable, it's my belief.'

By this time the party had left the station and reached the road, where a pretty low pony-carriage was standing, drawn by the notable Tim. It must be admitted that Gabrielle's first impression of the horse that was to convey her home was not wholly pleasing. Tim was a good deal higher than the pony-carriage, and of the tawny red hue which is sometimes said to denote a vicious temper. He was shaggy and unkempt-looking, in spite of the futile attempt that had evidently been made, with currycomb and brush, to coax his rugged coat into something like smoothness, if not sleekness. His attitude at that moment was certainly not such as to inspire alarm. His 'stand at ease' consisted of drooping his head and neck with an air of ludicrous stupidity; but at the sound of a familiar voice, and the smack of a familiar hand, he drew himself up, shook his head, gave a snort and a whisk of the tail, and cocked his ears with a wicked and knowing air.

'He's a rough customer to look at, but there ain't a better beast in all Kettlebury to go; and that's the main thing to my thinking.'

'O! I've no objection to him,' said Gabrielle, unable to control her laughter at the expression of Holford's face. 'When we are in Turkey we must do as the turkeys do. I think I should have felt disappointed if I had found a carriage and pair waiting to receive me. But how about the luggage?'

'I've got the donkey-cart handy by, ma'am.'

'A donkey-cart! But there are eight or nine enormous boxes, besides bonnet-boxes, carpet-bags, and portmanteaux, and other things.'

'Ah!' and the Kettlebury genius looked posed for a moment, enclosed his chin in one hand, and consulted the ground. He *was* a genius, however, possessed of a brain fertile in resources, and presently saw his way clear. 'There's five or six good donkey-loads there, if I'm not mistaken,' he observed. 'We'll take one with

us now, and I'll come back for another; and you, Tom,' addressing a bright-eyed lad standing at Tim's head, 'must borrow Jem Fry's donkey and cart, and make two journeys likewise; and never fear, ma'am, but by some means or other, if you leave it to me, you shall have it all under your own roof safe and sound to-night.'

'But what an undertaking!' said Gabrielle. 'You and your boy will be the whole afternoon and evening on the road, whereas one waggon with two horses might take the whole at once.'

'Yes, ma'am, if so be you know where to put your hand upon one; but while we were looking about for a leisable waggon, the donkeys would have done the business. Don't give yourself no concern about the matter, if you please, ma'am; leave it to me, and make your mind easy.'

'Very well; now you shall drive us home. I suppose you are the driver?'

'That's as you please, ma'am; but ladies in these parts mostly drives their own selves, and I wanted to stop and give an eye to the luggage. And as to Tim there, why he's as quiet as a lamb, he is; my little maiden of two years old could drive him.'

'I'm not much used to driving,' said Gabrielle, doubtfully; 'at least,' she added, with a smile, 'not to driving Tims.'

'O ma'am! you've nothing to do but make believe to hold the reins, and Tim will take you straight to your own door. He knows the way home, he do.'

'Well, Cecilia, what do you say? Will you trust yourself to my whip?'

'Wherever you risk your neck, Ella, I'm prepared to risk mine; but I don't altogether like the look of Tim.'

'O ma'am! Bless you, 'tis only his complexion. If I was to go as long as poor Tim without shaving my chin or combing my hair, I'll warrant you'd count me a queer-looking customer. Where should the poor beast learn decency and good manners?'

'Very true,' said Gabrielle, seating herself in the

driver's seat. 'Come, Holford, you are the best off behind, for if Tim kicks we shall be the first victims. Let me assist you, Cecilia.'

Gabrielle took the reins in one hand, and allowed her attendant to place the whip in the other, albeit she had not the remotest intention of using the latter. She felt a humiliating consciousness of timidity, and her nerves were not further fortified by the bearing of her companions. Miss Tudor, meekly submissive, seemed prepared for the worst, and perhaps on the whole an air of resignation is more aggravating than open rebellion. Holford, on the contrary, carried her head high, and a storm of indignant protest brooded in countenance and mien. Gabrielle, convinced that it was her town training alone that made her afraid to do what country ladies were in the habit of doing, summoned up all her resolution, gave the fatal 'click' to the horse, and drove off at a smart trot.

For some moments no one spoke. All three, it must be owned, expected the redoubted Tim to quicken his pace step by step, and watched anxiously for the trot to break into a gallop, and the gallop become a run-away. The trot, however, continued a trot—rough and lumbering, indeed, over rut and flint, regardless of delicate organisation or lady's-maids' nerves, but not otherwise dangerous. By degrees Gabrielle's confidence returned, and she found herself able to try and cheer one, at least, of her companions.

'This is novel, at any rate, Cecilia, and not worse than the jolting in Piccadilly. Think how pleasant it will be when I have a pony-carriage with more effective springs than this one, and a smooth-faced pony of my own, who won't cock his ears in the wicked way Tim does!'

'I hope so, Ella.'

'I am sure it will. Your hopefulness sounds very much like despair. How green the hedges look! How fresh and sweet the air smells! How pleasant even this dusty road is, with its sedgy border, to eyes that have been city bound for so long!'

Miss Tudor tried to respond, but her spirits had not the gay rebound of Gabrielle's, and after a one-sided conversation had continued for some minutes, Gabrielle was glad to fall back on the quiet of her own thoughts.

Truly her heart was full. 'Thoughts too deep for tears' were crowding upon her as she drove along the shady road, where spreading branches of oak and beech cast chequered shadows on the ground, and no sound disturbed the stillness save the cawing of rooks in some neighbouring elm-trees, and peasants' voices in a far-off field, whose accents were mellowed by distance. In the horizon, hill behind hill arose in undulating outline, each of fainter blue and more hazy form. In the intervening valley arose the distant spire of Kettlebury Church, the only discernible object above the mist that hung around the town. Further down the valley gleamed the river on which the town stood, banked on the one side by overhanging steepes graced with luxuriant foliage, while on the other side 'meadows trim with daisies pied' lay green and smiling in the sunshine. The hedge by which she was driving was crowned with wreaths of sweet-smelling honeysuckle, and every tiny flower peeping from its leafy home seemed to speak a welcome, to which Gabrielle responded with her heart's strength.

There was a loveliness in the scene around her—a stillness, a divineness in the air, with its tranquil murmur of gay insect life, that made Gabrielle sigh—a sigh not of sorrow, but of too great joy—a sigh of vain longing for increased capacity for enjoyment. Her feelings appeared dwarfed, incomplete, insufficient, in the presence of such boundless sources of delight. She felt as though her heart were striving to grasp at an unseen presence—the divinity of the woods and fields; she felt as if the rapture at her heart must pour itself out as incense at some hidden shrine; and involuntarily her eyes travelled upward, upward, past bush and bough, into the clear, unbroken blue above; and the yearnings of her heart were stilled—stilled with the wondrous reflection, 'Our thoughts are heard in Heaven.' Recol-

lections of the childhood spent amidst country pleasures were growing upon her moment by moment. The brown bole of an oak-tree, creviced with moss and lichen, brought its associations; the coo of a wood-pigeon in the plantation that skirted the road, the pink blossom of a ragged robin by the roadside, the sunlight playing through the quivering leaves over her head—all brought back dim and dreamy remembrances of hours that might have been passed in some former state of existence, or foreshadowings of future bliss.

Her meditations were brought abruptly to a close by Tim's turning sharply round a corner, at right-angles with the road they had been pursuing. It then first occurred to her that she had made no enquiries about the road, and she could recall to mind no directions she had received, except the consolatory assurance that if she held the reins, Tim knew the way. The decision with which Tim had taken the law into his own ruling inspired her with confidence in his sagacity, but her companions were unable to take this composed view of the case; and the nervous compression of Miss Tudor's lips, and the more than ordinary pallor of her countenance, caused Gabrielle some compunction. Yet in the buoyancy of spirit she was otherwise feeling, she could not help laughing, even while she commiserated her victims.

'Dear Cecilia, I never meant to try your nerves to this extent. Don't be frightened—we are going on very comfortably;' but at this point a rugged piece of road rendered Gabrielle's words somewhat confused, and sent her off into a fit of uncontrollable laughter, which only increased Miss Tudor's blank dismay. 'I assure you Tim is a worthy creature. I am convinced he knows what he is about, and that before long we shall find ourselves at Heatherbrae. I should have the greatest confidence in Tim if only he wouldn't cock his red ears in that wicked manner. My gardener said he would know the way, and I thought the man appeared very shrewd and sensible, and one who knew what he was about.'

'I am sure I don't wish to alarm you, dear Ella,' said Miss Tudor, in an uncertain voice, 'but you know we are driving quite away from Kettlebury.'

'So we are,' said Gabrielle, to whom the fact had not before presented itself. 'But then, Cecilia, Kettlebury S. Anne's was two miles from Kettlebury, so perhaps Tim is right after all. At all events we will give him the benefit of the doubt; if we see nothing that looks like Heatherbrae presently, we will stop and ask the way at the first house, or turn back, or do something or other decisive.'

Miss Tudor resigned herself once more, devoutly hoping that Tim might not do something or other decisive in the interval. A turn in the road now brought them within sight of a farmhouse—a genuine, old-fashioned farmhouse, with a thatched roof and a white-washed front, and a primitive garden, filled with old-fashioned, sweet-smelling flowers, between the house and the road. A lad passed them driving some horses into the farmyard, and Gabrielle asked whether the road led to Heatherbrae, and received in reply a very reassuring 'all right.' She would fain have pulled up and enjoyed some farmyard reminiscences, which the sight of the cream-coloured Guernsey cows with benign faces and deep dewlaps were awakening; but her companions regarding a cow but as a useful machine for giving milk, and a farmyard as a necessary evil, she drove on out of consideration for their already sorely taxed feelings, congratulating herself that such a farmhouse and such cows were at no great distance from her own home.

The road now took them through a picturesque glen, at the bottom of which danced and babbled a clear stream, overhung with beech and alder trees, and presenting a wealth of moss and fern on its winding banks. The next ascent brought them within sight of the mill, with its noisy wheel; and here, although overhanging plantations bounded the road on one side, the character of the scenery on the other side began to display symptoms of its bog and moorland parentage, which time had

not yet been able to efface. Tim also appeared to think he was nearing home, and as the road became more and more steep, he slackened his trot into a walk, and the walk presently degenerated into a crawl. The wicked ears ceased to be wicked, and the shaggy head was drooped in a desponding manner, so that Gabrielle, suddenly inspired with courage, administered a few gentle touches with the hitherto unused whip. But on Tim's rough hide this handling of the whip produced no more effect than the agreeable titillation of a fly might do, and as the hill before them appeared to be a long one, Gabrielle summoned all her powers to bestow a few effectual whacks. Alas! the first blow recoiled on the bestower; for such a cloud of thick dust out of the shaggy red coat flew back into their eyes, that Gabrielle, blinded with the dust, and convulsed with laughter, was glad to allow Tim to suit his own convenience, and choose his own pace.

And now pine plantations, and heathery knolls, and the pure moorland breeze, fragrant with the odour of peat and turf, and many an humble cot sending upwards its blue smoke from some sheltered hollow, told them that they were upon Kettlebury Moor. Another ten minutes brought them within sight of the hamlet church and of a picturesque house on a piece of rising ground near, which Gabrielle felt certain was Heatherbrae. So much occupied was she in contemplating its artistically grouped stacks of chimneys, that she was unaware that Tim had again turned away from the high-road, until the increased roughness of the motion of the carriage made her conscious of the fact that they were painfully lumbering into the court of a farmyard, far less pleasant and picturesque than the one she had so lately admired, and it became evident that the sagacious Tim had brought them safely to what he considered the end of the journey—his own master's back-door.

CHAPTER V.

Come, lovely Evening, with thy smile of peace,
Visit my humble dwelling, welcomed in,
Not with loud shouts, and the throng'd city's din
But with such sounds as bid all tumult cease
Of the sick heart; the grasshopper's faint pipe
Beneath the blades of dewy grass unripe,
The bleat of the lone lamb, the carol rude
Heard indistinctly from the village green,
The bird's last twitter from the hedge-row scene.
. . . I can leave the world, and feel most glad
To meet thee, Evening, here.—*William Lisle Bowles.*

HEATHERBRAE was a comparatively new house, built of brick, in the Gothic style. It stood on rising ground, and might, not inaptly, have been named Sunnyside, for it received the earliest gleam of the morning sun when it rose above the pine forest that sheltered the house on the eastern side, and its farewell ray as it sank at evening behind the moorland height which lay to the west. There was nothing sombre or mysterious about the place, unless it might be the solemn beauty of the dark pinus insignis, standing sentinel-like on the green sloping lawn. The oriel windows faced east and south, and the pleasant garden terminated in fields and fir plantations, and then broke off again abruptly into unreclaimed moorland.

Such was the patrimony of Gabrielle Hope, which she viewed for the first time on the sunny evening of a day in early August. She was received at her own door by the housekeeper who had had the charge of the house ever since the death of Mr. Erskine. The title of housekeeper carries with it an association of dignity, and Gabrielle was not prepared to find that it belonged in this instance to a tall, stout, masculine woman, of an olive complexion, but somewhat handsome gipsy face, and sparkling black eyes, whose skirts were of the shortest,

and who wore a coloured check handkerchief crossed over the bosom of her black stuff gown.

It must, nevertheless, be confessed that the young mistress was at heart better pleased than if she had been received by a conventional housekeeper—a pompous dame, one of the ‘treasures’ of modern times—in cap of blonde and velvet, and dress of rustling black silk, whose manners, easy and self-possessed, would have made the mistress feel herself to be a visitor, graciously welcomed to her own house.

‘I’m right glad to see you, ma’am,’ was the hearty salutation she received. ‘My name’s Mary Bird, at your service, ma’am; but for the most part they call me Molly—the poor old master always called me Molly, he did.’

‘I’m very glad to see you, Molly, and we must shake hands for my grandfather’s sake. I hope all his friends will be my friends, and I know already that you were one of his friends.’

‘Ah! ma’am, I did what I could for the dear old master, and it was a wished day for us all when we saw him carried up to the churchyard yonder.’ And Molly whisked the corner of her white apron into her bright black eye, and then looked up again, as mirthful as ever. ‘I was glad, I can tell you, ma’am, for one, when you wrote and said you were coming to live amongst us. Ah! ha!’ she laughed, as she gave a vigorous smack to Tim’s rugged back, ‘you’ve not been used to drive such a beast as this, I reckon. But he’s strong and safe, if he’s not a beauty, and I suppose now you’ll be having some little beauties of your own to drive. Sure, ma’am, you never told me two ladies were coming with you, and I’ve only got two bedrooms ready, besides the maid’s room upstairs. I suppose you couldn’t sleep two in one bed.’

‘Oh! we shall do very well,’ said Gabrielle, endeavouring to strangle a laugh, and wondering how she should make Molly aware of the fact that Holford, in her silk dress and be-flowered bonnet, was indeed the ‘maid.’ ‘Do you know we are very hungry? I

wonder if you have thought of preparing anything for us?'

'I've got the kittle on a-boiling, ma'am, and I've got eggs in the house, and bread and butter; but as you said nothing about getting in anything else, I didn't like to make so bold.'

'Never mind; that will do delightfully. Holford will make us an omelette presently, and we will have tea. Are you too tired, Cecilia, to walk once round?'

'Not at all, dear Ella. Indeed, I feel much better since I got out of the carriage. I am quite sorry now that I was so uncharitable in my judgment of poor Tim; but he did look a little wicked, didn't he, Ella?'

'Very wicked, indeed; I ought to beg your pardon for having subjected you to such an ordeal. What pleasant rooms! And, O Cecilia! fancy finding a Molly! I didn't think there was a Molly left in the world.'

The house was large and conveniently arranged, although the furniture was plain and worn. The drawing-room was an unusually delightful room, with bay-windows to the south and east, and generally flooded with sunshine. The upstairs rooms were almost equally pleasant.

Having inspected the house, Gabrielle led the way to the kitchen, where she found Molly standing over a basket full of fresh-laid eggs. 'Which of you ladies, ma'am, was to make the dish o' eggs?'

'Neither of us ladies,' said Gabrielle, glad of an opportunity of explaining, in Holford's absence, the relation in which she stood to her. 'Neither of us, Molly, but my own maid, who is gone upstairs with some of my things.'

'Bless me! I never saw her. Did she come with Adam?'

'You did see her, Molly, if you recollect; she was sitting in the back part of the carriage when we arrived.'

'What! the lady in the silk gown? Well, I never!'

and for some moments poor Molly was dumb with astonishment.

'She won't wear a silk gown to-morrow morning,' said Gabrielle, in an apologetic tone. 'You see, Molly, in towns people are apt to dress in grander fashion than they do in the country.'

'I know that, for sure, ma'am; but 'twasn't for to say the gown exactly—but O my! I thought for all the world 'twas a lady. If you please, ma'am, does she take her meals in the kitchen or in the parlour?'

'Well, not in the parlour,' said Gabrielle, amused at finding herself in some perplexity. 'What do you say, Cecilia? There appears to be no servants'-hall. Will Holford object to the kitchen?'

'I don't think, ma'am, the kitchen will be suitable,' said Molly, reflectively, producing as she spoke an old metal teapot with no handle and a battered spout, and a few cracked teacups. 'You see, ma'am, I can't set out a tea-table fit for a lady—leastways not a lady exactly, but such a good take-off for a lady.'

'I think you had better ask Holford if she would like to take tea in her own bedroom to-night,' said Gabrielle, 'and to-morrow I will consider about a servants'-hall. This is a cheerful kitchen, Molly; but that clock of yours is surely wrong—several hours wrong. What do you imagine the time to be?'

'The clock's never gone right, ma'am—not to say right—since the poor old master died. I'm of opinion there's something radically wrong with her inside. Adam Clack, he took the clock to pieces, but he couldn't make no hand of it. "Clock's 'mazed," says he—"reg'late un fast, or reg'late un slow, 'tis all one—her rattles on full pelt." And sure enough, 'gainst us reaches Sunday night, clock's well into Tuesday morning. So now we just wind her up every evening, and leave her to please herself about the hours o' the day or the days o' the month. She's just as good company as ever, and that's the most thing we want a clock for, in a lonesome place like this, for the sun will tell me time o' day well enough for my own concerns.'

'Is Adam Clack the watchmaker?'

'Bless you! no, ma'am; but he's just got a little common sense in his head, and for my part I think that's better than being so over and above scientific. He's a smart hand at cleaning the flues, or new leathering the pump, or oiling the jack, and I can't see myself why he couldn't put the clock into working order; but I suppose it's the same with clocks and jacks as it is with people. One person's inside is quite different from another person's inside, and if you expect one doctor to put them all to rights, you'll find in the long run that some of them will stop altogether.'

'Well, Molly, I am much pleased with the appearance of your kitchen. Can we go into the garden this way?'

'Yes, ma'am, you can go that way, and I'll make bold to go round with you, if it's no offence. It's a brave garden, it is, and was the pride of the old master's heart; for it grewed nought but stones till the master came and put new life into it. And as for Adam—I believe he's as much taken up with the garden as ever he is with any of his own brats down yonder. You may go the country round and not find such paze, and banes, and turmutts, and car'ts, as Adam brings in.'

'Is Adam the gardener then?'

'Well, ma'am, for sure there's no other, and Adam won't let no one but his own Tom so much as put a spade into the ground; for he says, says he, "Them as gives the toil should gain the glory."'

'And this is the coach-house, I suppose. It looks roomy and convenient. Can you open the door of the coach-house and stables?'

'No, ma'am, that I can't, for Adam he car's the keys in his own pocket, and is mighty particklar that no one shan't go in without by-your-leave.'

'O! then Adam Clack is coachman and groom?'

'Adam Clack, you see, ma'am, is an improved car'k'ter now, to what he was when first the master came. Not but what he was always a handy man, was Adam Clack. But he had his faults like the rest of us, and sometimes, of a Saturday night, when wages was

paid, he'd be overtook, and forget to bring home more than half; and O! ma'am, that's a wished thing where there's a wife and a dozen young ones. But ever since he took the plug he's been a different sort of man altogether.'

'Took the plug!' repeated Gabrielle.

'Took the plug, ma'am, never to drink no more. The master, he didn't hold with the plug, and he used to say, "Prayer is better than plug, Adam!" but some of us, ma'am, more's the pity, are too weak to mind the prayer, but strong enough to keep the plug; so Adam he took the plug, and a good day it was for Kezia and the children, to say nothing of himself.'

'What an excellent garden, Cecilia, and how neatly kept! I hope you are not feeling tired. The house looks well from all points. It is most picturesquely grouped together, and the gardens are well arranged, so that the lawn and pleasure-grounds shall surround the house.'

'I think it is a very pretty place indeed,' said Miss Tudor. 'We can see the Church from almost any point.'

'And how clear and exhilarating the air is! Ah! Molly, if you had lived in towns as long as I have done, you would be enchanted with this pleasant country spot.'

'I've heard, ma'am, that London is a mighty disagreeable place, more particklarly in the winter. There was a cousin of mine lived there as cook, and she told me she was for ever underground, and obliged to have lights burning, and wouldn't know day from night if it wasn't for the clocks. My! how often I've thought of the consummation of tallow dips that must go on in London!'

Gabrielle laughed, and turned to admire the view. 'How picturesque those cottages look, half hidden by trees, in the hollow yonder! Look at the miniature ricks of hay and straw by the side of that tiny home-stead; those must belong to a thrifty man and a neat farmer, I am sure.'

'And so they do, ma'am. You may go far before you find a neater man than Adam Clack.'

'Adam Clack! Are those his ricks? Is he a farmer?'

'He has fields of wheat and barley, ma'am, and some orchards, and a horse and some donkeys, and a cow, and calves, and pigs, and ducks, and poultry; but we don't call him a farmer for all that. He employs no labourers under him—at least, not for constancy; he has children enough to help him about everything.'

'What sweet flowers!' exclaimed Gabrielle, as she bent over a border filled with sweet-williams, and carnations, and mignonette. A regular old-fashioned garden, Cecilia, in which my great, great grandmother might have gathered rosemary and thyme and rue. But, come, I see you are tired. We will go into the house and see whether Holford has made the omelette. A cup of tea will be quite refreshing. By the bye, we have no tea until the chest of tea arrives. What can we do? Can you lend us any, Molly?'

'No, indeed, ma'am, I can't. You see, a single woman like myself don't need to keep a stock of tea. But I can get some down to shop, and I shall be back before you have taken off your bonnet.'

'Is there a shop on Kettlebury Common?'

'Yes, ma'am, you can get most everything you want down to Adam Clack's; and it's a brave, tidy bit of a shop, though perhaps you mightn't think much of it, seeing you are just come from London; but it does well enough for country folk.'

'Then let us have a pound of tea and some sugar, as soon as possible. O! how very pretty! Hark! Cecilia.'

As Gabrielle spoke, a pleasant chime of village bells reached them from the grey Church-tower. It was a simple and unpretending peal, but bright and joyous, and suited to the rural simplicity of the hamlet. Gabrielle was enchanted. She stood in a trance for some moments, all her senses gratified. The sun was shedding warm tints over the green and purple moorland. The common flowers that had been fostered by her grand-

father's hand sent their homely sweetness on the breeze. The corncrake was uttering his harsh, yet pleasing 'crake, crake' in a neighbouring field. The evening air, laden with the fragrance of peat and moist earth, just stirred the feather in her hat as it passed by, and cooled her temples; and the simple welcome of the village bells, as they chimed across the hollow that lay between Heatherbrae and the Church, completed the spell that bound her.

'Ah! ma'am,' said Molly, 'that's Adam's doing, you may be sure. He says to Kezia, says he, "As soon as ever the mistress is at home in her own house, send up the children and give her a peal."'

'Very kindly thought of! But what has Adam to do with the Church?'

'Bless you! ma'am, Adam! Why everything, I should suppose. He's the clerk, and says "Amen" on Sundays; and he's the gravedigger, and he's the bell-ringer, and he keeps the Church clean and the yard neat. No one has anything to do with the Church except Adam, unless it be Kezia and the children. He sings in the choir, too, and does pumpy to the bellows, besides putting up the greens at Christmas. He's a terrible handy man is Adam Clack.'

'Upon my word, I should think so. Is there anything else that he does?'

'No, ma'am; without the master had company, and then Adam used to help to wait at table, and wash the dishes afterwards. And very well he used to wait, I've heard the master say. Kezia, his wife, is handy enough, for the matter of that, and so are all the children. Kezia takes in the washing of the house, and the elder children have been most uncommonly pushed on, to be sure. Some of them are in wonderful high places, and have to wait on lords and on ladies, so I hear say.'

'Very likely,' said Gabrielle, a little wearily. 'Now, Cecilia, we really will rest ourselves and have some tea, as soon as ever Molly can procure it for us. O! one thing more—what time does the post come in in the morning?'

'Why, ma'am, the letters ought to be here by nine o'clock, so the master used to say; but it's often nearer ten than nine when Tom Clack comes.'

'Bless the Clacks! Is Tom Clack the post?'

'The only post we ever see here, ma'am.'

'Thank you, Molly, and now we need detain you no longer. Come in, Cecilia; between ourselves, I am nearly Clacked to death. But Molly is a worthy creature, and worth half-a-dozen Holfords.'

CHAPTER VI.

Yet she, who quivered at another's pain,
Her own with stoic firmness could sustain;
Stood unsubdued, but meekly kissed the rod,
And took with patience all that came from God;
And curb'd her grief, when sorrow's cup ran o'er,
Lest those who saw her weep should weep the more.

Knight.

IN a small room in a north-country town a young girl watched by a dying mother.

The room was meanly furnished and destitute of comforts, but all that thoughtfulness could suggest had been done to soothe the long sickness that had been silently borne there. The window was half unclosed to allow the soft breath of summer to fan the faint brow that rested on the pillow of that humble bed, and the blind was half drawn down, that the sunshine might not distress the weary eyes about to close for their long sleep.

Sorrow, privation, and anxiety were written on the worn features of the mother, and reflected, as it were, on the young, but sorrow-stricken, face of the daughter. On the girlish brow there rested an expression of present anguish, which suffering and failing powers had obliterated from that of the mother—it was the anguish

of parting. The loneliness, yearning, and despair written in the sad brown eyes of the daughter, who had but lately seen her seventeenth birthday, far exceeded the suffering calmness of the wasted face of the invalid. That young face would have been a lovely face in health and prosperity; it was an exquisitely sweet one in the hour of trouble. The eyes, large, dark and mournful, bore that indescribable expression of sympathy and tenderness never seen but in such eyes—they were eyes to love rather than admire. The complexion was not fair, and the oval face was too much drawn by lines of sorrow to retain absolute beauty, though the features were refined and delicate, and the whole was softened by the smooth fall of brown hair, gathered simply back from the brow.

‘Aileen!’ said the mother, opening her eyes for a moment, to ascertain whether her child was at hand. ‘There are some few things that I must say. It is cooler this afternoon, and I feel better able to talk. Shall we look through the desk now?’

‘It will tire you, dearest mother. Why not tell me what you wish to say without the fatigue of looking through the desk?’

‘I should like to give it into your own keeping. When you look through it you may wish to ask questions, and who will answer them if I am not here? Besides, we must settle what you are to do first when I am gone.’

Aileen made no further objection, and fetched the little desk from a table against the wall, with the same expression of unspoken woe on her face.

A gentle knock at the door arrested her attention, and she softly opened it. The woman of the house, slatternly, but kindly featured, was without. ‘Miss Hart, won’t you take a turn or two in the sunshine while I stay with your mamma? How is she this afternoon?’

Aileen shook her head mournfully. ‘I cannot leave her, Mrs. Finch, thank you, though I am just as much obliged to you.’

'O my dear, do take a breath of fresh air. You look as if you wanted it, and I'll do anything and everything for your mamma.'

'Not to-day—perhaps to-morrow,' and Aileen's eyes filled with tears. 'I cannot leave her to-day.'

'Dear soul!' and Mrs. Finch, whose eyes were also full of tears, felt that there would be no kindness in pressing her offer, and departed.

Aileen carried the desk to her mother, and helped to find the key that unlocked it. Mrs. Hart appeared, however, to be in no haste to open it, but began talking of Aileen's plans.

'What shall you do, Ailie, when I am gone?'

'I don't know exactly, mother—try to find a situation as soon as possible—unless—'

'Unless what?'

'Unless you would advise me, mother, to do what we were talking of the other night—'

'Do you mean that you should go to your sister?'

'Yes.'

'She would not receive you, my Aileen; my poor darling, she would not acknowledge you.'

'O mother! I cannot think that. A sister reject a sister! Think what it is: a sister—next to father and mother!'

'She would not admit that you were a sister.'

'I cannot believe it!' exclaimed Aileen, clasping her hands. 'I judge of my sister by myself. I know how I should welcome her, and cherish and protect her, if she came to me poor and friendless and homeless. All my life long, mother, I have thought of my sister, and I can never believe her to be cold and heartless, until she herself shows me that she is so.'

'But, Ailie, I must try to make you see the difference between your sister and yourself, and prove to you that you must not judge of her by yourself. All your life has been spent in anxiety and sorrow. You have had no friend but your mother, and no pleasures but what you could find for yourself in books and flowers. Your sister, on the contrary, has been a

petted child all her life. Sorrow and anxiety have never drawn near her. She has been rich and tenderly cared for, in the midst of society, with numberless friends around her; no doubt petted and flattered and courted by all. She never felt the want of a sister; and how would she welcome one who, poor and friendless, came to claim a share in her wealth, and a position like her own?

‘O mother! I would not take her wealth—I don’t want her position. I would ask nothing but that she should once call me “sister,” and then I would go away, far, far away from her, and earn my own bread, and trust to her writing me a little letter now and then, so that I might know that I had a sister.’

‘After once acknowledging you for a sister, her pride would forbid her to allow you to take a dependent situation. In her rank of life people find it easier to ignore such claims altogether.’

‘I don’t believe wealth could ever break the link,’ persisted Aileen. ‘You know God made us sisters, and, rich or poor, the link is there, and cannot be broken—we had but one father. Years ago, mother, I met with a line, and I have treasured it ever since: “Brothers are brothers evermore;” and if brothers, then sisters. O! don’t ask me to give up my faith in my sister. It is the only comfort God is leaving me on earth.’

‘I would have you bear the blow now, rather than when I am gone, and there is no one to shed a tear with you. Years—many years ago, Aileen, I wrote to one of your sister’s trustees, and laid some of the facts of my life before him; and he sent me an answer—such an answer—cold and worldly—saying that such claims were very commonly made after the death of the principal party, and that if pressed they would be resisted to the uttermost.’

‘My sister never knew!’ exclaimed Aileen, eagerly.

‘Perhaps not, but I wrote again to the other trustee, and received in effect the same answer. I had no

money to spend on a lawsuit, and no friend to advise me, so there the matter has rested.'

'This does not shake my trust in my sister.'

'Poor child! the very name brings you comfort. But you do not perceive that these are the very people by whom your sister has been brought up—who have educated and trained her, and made their principles hers. Aileen, you are very young, and I have tried to keep from you the knowledge of wickedness; but there are some things I must tell you now: for the world will not cherish you as I have cherished you, and these things hurt less from a mother's lips than from the lips of a stranger.'

'You will tire yourself, mother.'

'No, no, I *won't* be tired. I have told you that I was left an orphan when I was only a few years older than you are now, and that I went into a situation as governess. I was very lonely, God knows; I yearned for love, and no one loved me. Those who paid me thought only of getting their money's worth out of me. Father, mother, and children seemed all in league against the governess. Some families are not like this; but I was young, and miserably unfortunate in my lot, and having had no experience, I thought all places were alike, and that governesses were a despised, distrusted, persecuted race. Then Mr. Hope came—handsome, courteous, clever, agreeable—O Aileen! you can never know how fascinating your father was. He alone, of all whom I had ever met there, did not despise the governess. I loved him—I must own it—before ever he said he loved me. I loved him with the intense, clinging love that only such desolate beings feel. He told me he was a widower with one little girl; and when he asked me whether I would marry him, I said "yes," with as joyful a heart as ever beat. We were married directly, without anyone's knowledge, and I have the certificate of the marriage in this desk, as you know. The family I lived with never knew why I left them so hurriedly, for I told them only that I was wanted at home; and oh! how my heart rejoiced at the thought

that there was again in the wide world a home for me, and one who loved me, and, better still, one whom I could love and cherish with all the strength of my yearning heart.'

The mother paused, exhausted, and some minutes elapsed before she could resume her tale.

'Now I must tell you, what I never told you before, Aileen, that your father was not a man of high morality; and that, although, thank God, I was his own wedded wife, and you were our own unstained child, yet there had been much in his previous history, and there was also much in his subsequent life, that could not bear the light of day. Such having been the case, his relatives are naturally suspicious of any claims brought forward after his death. I knew nothing of this when I married him, nor guessed that his first wife had been supposed to have died of a broken heart. He was ever kind to me, and I was contented and happy; yet I wondered much that he wished me to call myself Hart, and not Hope; that he made me known to none of his friends, and that his child, whom I would have loved and cared for, was never brought to me. After the first twelvemonth he used to leave me for long intervals, but he always gave me a plausible reason for absence; and I, supposing that men must see more of the world than women could do, made myself happy with my child in my quiet country home. But at length, by pure accident, I one day read in the paper the announcement of his death in a foreign land, and I knew that for the future I had nothing in the whole world to love but you, and nothing to depend upon but a pitiful annuity which he had purchased for me soon after our marriage. Then a dreadful fear came across me that our marriage might have been no marriage, and I could not rest until I had revisited the church in which it had taken place, and obtained this certificate, which is your greatest treasure, my Aileen, and, with my wedding ring, the only treasure I have to leave you. You know what our life has been since then, and you are now in a position to judge whether it is

likely your sister—his “lovely little Gabrielle,” as your father used to call her—will receive you as a sister, or will not rather think that your story has reference to some of those sad periods of his life which caused her own mother such pain and sorrow.’

‘O mother! mother! do not ask me to give up my sister! I think she will hear me patiently, if she does no more, and will judge of my story calmly. And O, when we are looking at each other face to face—her eyes into my eyes—perhaps God will draw us together with the thought of the father, who brought sadness upon both our lives; and we shall feel that we are no strangers, and our voices will sound familiar in each other’s ears; and something, something will whisper to us both, “Sisters are sisters evermore.”’

‘May God grant it!’ said the mother, faintly. ‘Far be it from me to shake such trust as yours, Aileen. I have now told you all, and I leave the rest to God. In the desk is the certificate, and some letters, and his picture. Show me his picture once more, for I loved him in spite of all, and he was never harsh to me. Let me keep the picture under my pillow, but put away the desk. I am too weary to look through it now, and the story I have told you will make all clear. O Aileen! this weakness—it speaks of the end—the end will soon be here.’

But the end was not yet come. Many days of weariness and suffering wore away, and Aileen’s face grew thinner and paler before the dreaded hour arrived that left her on earth alone. Alone, and O how lonely! with no friend to advise her, none to share the doubts and forebodings that crowded upon her imagination, none to relieve the terror and despair that pressed upon her in the solitary watches of the night, in the same room with the still, solemn form of her who had been the one and only friend of her past life. Yet One beheld the forsaken child, and to Him and His Fatherly care she turned and clung in her anguish; and found, not peace, indeed, as yet, but a dim assurance and conviction that

in His sight she was precious, and that nothing could befall her but that which was by Him permitted.

She had but a slender sum in her purse, which, small as it was, had been saving for years out of the scanty income they could call their own, that the wife of Gabrielle Hope might be laid decently in the ground for her long rest, and his daughter be enabled to procure a situation in which she might maintain herself.

When the funeral was over, the clergyman, who had been in the habit of visiting the dying mother, called to speak a few words of comfort to the daughter, and enquired kindly as to her plans. Aileen's plans were already formed. Her first and most earnest desire was to seek her sister, but a difficulty presented itself at the outset, as she knew not where her sister might be. She told Mr. Williams that she believed she had a friend who would be kind to her, if she could but discover where she was living. A reference to the papers in her desk proved that Miss Hope's home was with an uncle, Mr. Pierrepont, who resided part of the year in London, and whose country seat was Headworthy, near ——. It was easy to identify the member of Parliament, but as Aileen wished neither Mr. Pierrepont nor Miss Hope to be addressed on her behalf, but rather desired to discover the whereabouts of the latter, and seek her in person, Mr. Williams promised to write to a friend resident in the town near which Headworthy was situated, and if possible obtain this information.

By this means it came about that, in the course of a few days, Aileen heard of her sister's having inherited a large property, and being now resident on her own estate, near the small town of Kettlebury. This news, it must be confessed, was not wholly welcome; for, notwithstanding her firm trust in Gabrielle's real goodness of heart, Aileen could not conceal from herself that this exaltation of her sister widened the gulf that already existed between their respective circumstances; while the dread that she might herself possess some legal claim to a share in the newly-acquired wealth, rendered her the more reluctant to prove her own identity.

Still something must be done, and done immediately ; and the very thought of seeking a situation at a distance from the sister who was all she had in the world, was insupportable. To be in Gabrielle's neighbourhood, unknown and unsuspected, would give her some satisfaction, and perhaps afford opportunities of judging of her disposition, and even of declaring herself, should a favourable opening occur. In her sorrow and desolation her thoughts turned more than ever in this direction, and young and inexperienced as she was, she could not estimate what were the chances of meeting with a situation likely to suit her, in an old-world market-town where wealthy residents were few.

Once at Kettlebury, she fancied her course would be clear of all obstacles ; and Mr. Williams, believing that she was certain to find a kind friend in Miss Hope, suggested no doubts. Aileen was well qualified for taking a situation as governess to young children, but she had never yet held such a post, and she forgot that in such a case references were absolutely indispensable.

As soon as she could dispose of the few things which were too cumbrous to take with her, she prepared for her departure. The night before leaving, she went to take a last look at the only spot on earth that was dear to her. Although her resources were fast shrinking, she had not been able to bear the thought of leaving behind her a nameless grave, which she might never at any future time be able to identify. The simplest of headstones marked the spot, with the inscription, ' Mary, wife of Gabriel Hope.'

Poor Aileen ! She felt as if she had never before realised the extent of her loss. While she could visit the spot where her mother slept, a kind of link had appeared to exist between them ; but now that she was leaving even that behind her, the whole forlornness of her situation burst upon her. When the few pounds now in her purse were gone, nothing but her own exertions stood between herself and a workhouse ; and as she thought that in a workhouse she might pine and perish, and that no being on earth would drop a tear on her

grave, she laid her head on the grassy mound, and sobbed as if from a breaking heart.

Poor child! she sobbed until the sobbing turned to prayer, and after the prayer came the soothing assurance, 'Thou art thy Saviour's darling, seek no more;' and, accustomed from childhood to rest on the Unseen, her despairing tears became less violent, and a trustful, enduring spirit grew up within her, constraining her to 'suffer and be strong.'

CHAPTER VII.

The morn is up again, the dewy morn,
With breath all incense, and with cheek all bloom,
Laughing the clouds away with playful scorn,
And living as if earth contained no tomb,—
And glowing into day. *Childe Harold.*

WHEN Gabrielle opened her eyes at an early hour on the morning after her arrival at Heatherbrae, her first sensation was one of unalloyed delight. Her room was flooded with the glory of the rising sun. She rose, feeling all the exhilaration caused by bountiful light and heat. As she drew up her Venetian blind, the prospect which lay in all its loveliness before her filled her heart to overflowing with gratitude to the Giver.

The view on which she gazed was a lovely one. It commanded the vale of Kettlebury, and the range of hills beyond, which were wrapt in a misty haze. A cloud-like vapour rested in the valley, marking the course of the river. In the foreground arose, on one hand, the dark pine-forest, sombre and grand; the pine-trees mounting in layers, row behind row, in irregular symmetry, were illuminated by the sunshine; light and shade stood out in bold relief, yet hazy and mysterious withal, until the eye reached the uppermost range, where

an undulating and broken outline of pine-crests met the sky. At the foot of the forest, in a picturesque bottom, commanded by the height of Heatherbrae, nestled a few thatched cottages, embowered in brighter foliage. Apple and cherry trees, and a stately poplar or two, sheltered the tiny homesteads that were sending upward their wreaths of blue and curling smoke. Nearer home a ploughed field spread a carpet of most rich and gracious colouring. Indescribable tints of blended red, purple, and brown met the eye, overlaid with the sheen of the morning dew. On one side of the field the boundary hedge of heath and gorse stood forth, fringed with a spangled cloud of dewdrops, in which the prismatic colours were occasionally caught and reflected, and flashed back to her gaze with a dazzling lustre. Dark shadows were cast in bold relief across the ruddy soil by chestnut and pine trees that bounded the vision on the east; and nearer home again, the mossy lawn sparkled with dew, and the glistening drops hung pendant on the drooping deodara, and gave a lustrous brightness to the feathery outline of the cupressus.

Kneeling to say her morning prayer, within sight of the everlasting hills from whence cometh help, fanciful thoughts flitted through her mind—pure fancies that harmonised well with her posture, and elevated her heart for the act. She thought she felt more near to Heaven than she had ever done in her town home. She felt that the transition of thought from 'nature up to nature's God,' required no effort, and that her highest conception of Heaven must be engrafted on some such scene as the one before her. The annoyances and vexations of her past life seemed to fall from her as a cast-off mantle in the presence of nature's great peace-giving countenance. Neither few nor sparing were the thanks she offered up to Providence for having cast her lines in such pleasant places, and then, with a sense of vigour and refreshment that had long been unknown to her, she prepared herself for the duties and pleasures of the day.

It was still early, but she felt impatient to be out of

doors, breathing the pure moorland air, and enjoying the first fragrance of the sweet-scented flowers, whose odour had been with her in imagination throughout the silent night. From her window she could see the rabbits as they gambolled fearlessly around the shrubs on the mossy lawn. A green woodpecker with a crimson crest was seeking worms amidst the long grass just beneath, and 'cheerful birds chirping their sweet good-morrows' from every bush and tree, enticed her from her room with the joyful conviction, that at Heatherbrae she was indeed about to find the home for which she had so long been yearning.

The garden at Heatherbrae was no 'gay parterre,' being somewhat stiff and precise; but O, how pleasant! Mr. Erskine's fancy had been for what are vulgarly called 'common flowers,' and in this particular his grand-daughter's taste coincided with his own. The borders were filled to overflowing with old-fashioned plants and flowers. Hollyhocks, sunflowers, and dahlias stood in the rear, and roses and carnations, wallflowers and sweet peas, stocks and marigolds bloomed in profusion. Here a bush of lavender or hyssop recalled fragrant associations of past ages and time-honoured usages. There a plant of southernwood or boys'-love carried Gabrielle back to childish days, when, seated by her aunt in Church, a faded nosegay, still warm from the giver's hand, would be thrust into her hand by some shy school-girl seated in the aisle.

From the first moment she set foot in it Gabrielle loved that simple and old-world garden. No geraniums, verbenas or heliotropes, no gazanias or dialetras could have pleased her so well as did the feverfew, honesty and crown-imperials which she found there. Flowers of the hen-and-chicken daisy still lingered on their stems, roses blossomed in the sunny corners, while pansies held up a single eye to the sun. In harmony with this primitive garden was the row of thatched beehives, with their musical crew already revelling in the sunshine above, and the wealth of honey-giving blossoms around. Gabrielle, who had reproached her

cousin with never having closed her eyes over a violet, now drew near, and listened with covered eyes to the busy whisper, so rich in association, which is surely one of the most entrancing of nature's sweet sounds.

After an hour thus spent 'amid the various melodies of nature,' which, says the poet, 'calm the soul and fit it for good thoughts, better than silence,' the recollection that she had duties to perform as hostess induced her to direct her steps towards the house. Cecilia's kind face greeted her from the parlour-window, and the aroma of fresh-made coffee met her at the door.

'I begin already to feel that this is home,' she observed, in a glad tone, as she kissed her cousin. 'Do you like these primitive hours as well as I do? Eight o'clock! Aunt Caroline is just turning round for "a little more sleep and a little more slumber," and I should be doing the same if I were in Grosvenor Square.'

'You look fresh now, Ella, and almost rosy. How will Colonel Mostyn like your early hours?'

'I am not afraid of such an old campaigner as Uncle Henry, but I have my doubts about Emma. You are looking rested this morning, Cecilia. Do you know that we have a great deal of hard work before us to-day?'

'Let me hear what we have to do?'

'In the first place, we have to find some servants. I want a Betty and a Nanny and a Joan to complete my establishment.'

'Are they all to wear short skirts and thick boots?'

'Not thick boots—we will buy some noiseless shoes for Molly as soon as possible. Don't you think, however, that I am very happy in having a Molly and an Adam Clack amongst my retainers?'

'Well, I think you are, judging of Molly by herself, and Adam by Molly's opinion of him. I wonder whether he believes as implicitly in her as she does in him.'

'We shall soon know. As to my servants, Joan must be younger than Nanny and Betty because she will have to wait at table. But then, who can teach

her to wait at table?—O, I forgot! Adam can do that and everything else—he shall teach Joan.'

'But how do you expect Holford to settle down amongst your Mollys and Bettys? Have you heard her opinion of Heatherbrae yet?'

'To tell you the truth, I am not altogether pleased with Holford. She seems inclined to give herself airs. Her conversation last night, when she was brushing my hair, annoyed me. I should not wonder if she did not long remain with me.'

'What! has Holford given warning?'

'Not exactly; but she told me last night she could not remain here unless I intended to keep a butler and footman, and she spoke disrespectfully of Molly and Adam.'

Miss Tudor smiled. 'Poor Holford!'

'How can you pity her! I told her she had quite disappointed me. I provoked her, too, I suspect; for I told her I was weary of silk gowns, and preferred Molly's stuff one, and that Adam's fustian was better than any crimson plush. However, she ended by saying she would try to make the best of it for a few weeks, if she could be quite sure that we should leave again before Christmas.'

'Accommodating Holford! Did you come to terms?'

'No, indeed; I said I should probably settle here for life, and had not the remotest intention of encumbering myself with men-servants. I am very anxious to complete my establishment, however, for Uncle Henry and Emma may write any day to announce that they have started, and we ought to be settled in before they arrive. Their bedrooms also must be partly refurnished; they look desolate and neglected. Besides, we must not forget that we have to procure a pony. We must certainly go into Kettlebury to-day. Are you equal to such a walk, or shall we have recourse to Tim?'

'What do you say to Tim driven by Adam Clack?'

'My self-love is sorely wounded. I could not have believed you capable of such base ingratitude. We

came to no harm, even when Tim took the bit between his teeth, and chose his own road. Recollect that if we had followed your advice we should have driven miles out of our way.'

'I know I was wrong and Tim was right; but, Ella, you were ruminating in such an absent manner the whole time, that I don't think you know how nearly we were overturned two or three times.'

'Were we?' said Gabrielle, laughing. 'I was a little absent, I confess; but I have no recollection of thinking we should be overturned. I consider that Tim did great credit to my policy of non-intervention. Of course driving is one of my factotum's many accomplishments.'

'Do you expect to obtain servants in Kettlebury?'

'I suppose so. Holford seemed to take it as a matter of course that I should get them from London; but it would be ridiculous to bring city airs and graces into the country. I hope to meet with one or two of the real old-fashioned sort, who will become attached to me, and live in my service some thirty or forty years—perhaps all their lives.'

'I am afraid modern notions will have found their way into even this remote neighbourhood.'

'We must hope not. I am very much pleased with Molly and Adam. You know a Molly of twenty might be trained to anything.'

'Not if she is to be trained by the Molly of fifty. That appears to me to be the real difficulty. You have no one to introduce refined ways and manners into the household.'

'Oh, refinement is innate—you can't instil it. A well-disposed girl will fall instinctively into your ways, and be only too glad to discard all traces of the coarseness and vulgarity of her bringing-up. I shan't be hard upon a few blunders at first, and as for simplicity—the more simple and unconventional she is the better.'

'Well, we can but try,' said Miss Tudor, gently.

Breakfast over, Gabrielle had an interview with Molly, who received her with genial pleasure. The subject of

servants having been introduced, Molly proved fertile in suggestions. She had a niece of her own who would just suit Miss Hope for parlour-maid. Had she ever lived out before? No, that she hadn't, but she had long had a wish to live out in good service. Poor soul! She was so crippled in one arm, that she was not fit for hard work, so a parlour-maid's place would just suit her. Or, continued Molly, her poor dear brother's widow would be glad to serve Miss Hope. She had a little family, and it was hard times with them, but she would put out the children, and come and be laundry-maid, if it was agreeable to Miss Hope. And then, to be sure, a housemaid would be wanted, and she knew of a nice girl, a sort of relation of her own, who lost her mother when she was quite young, and now had a stepmother, who treated her so badly that she had made up her mind to go out. Her clothes mightn't be altogether suitable for a gentleman's house just at first, but Molly would give her one of her old black gowns to turn and turn about, and she could get better clothes after a bit.

It was well for Gabrielle that Molly thus unsuspectingly laid bare her transparent schemes for providing for those of her own household. The young mistress might, by a little adroitness, have been ensnared into experimentalising upon a solitary protégée, out of consideration for Molly's worthy self; but her philanthropy was not equal to finding an asylum for crippled and half-clothed nieces, a widowed sister-in-law, and all the tribe of needy relatives to whom Molly, in the largeness of her heart, might think fit to extend her patronage. She therefore laid it down as a *sine quâ non* that she could engage no servant who had not previously lived in good service; and was then not a little surprised to discover that the candidates for her favour had been desired by the officious Molly to wait upon her at three separate hours of the day. Gabrielle had yet to learn that ignorance can take liberties as well as insolence, though the absence of premeditation may rob the offence of half its offensiveness.

Finding that it was desirable to mature her plans as rapidly as possible, Gabrielle requested Molly to summon Adam to an interview with her in the parlour. The interview of the previous day had been so hurried, that she had not had time to study the physiognomy of her gardener. Adam was rather below the middle height, some fifty-five years of age, strongly built, with an air of assurance and self-possession that seemed to imply that he considered his own career to have been a not unsuccessful one. His forehead was low and wide, his head flat and somewhat bald, his grey eyes humorous in expression. But perhaps the most characteristic feature in his countenance was the long upper lip, denoting strength of will and determination—attributes which a more intimate acquaintance with his character clearly brought to light.

Adam entered the parlour with a profound obeisance, and then stood immediately inside the door, with one thumb in his waistcoat-pocket, and the other hand enfolding and caressing his chin, alternately fixing his gaze intently on the carpet, or studying with equal intentness, and his head on one side, the flies that sported on the ceiling.

‘I hope, ma’am, I see you well this morning.’

‘Very well, indeed, thank you, Adam, and anxious to have a little conversation with you upon different subjects.’

‘I am sure, ma’am, it will always be my pleasure to give you any information or assistance that lies in my power. I’m not much of a scholar, but for all that I’ve made my way in the world, so to say, and brought up a long family, and put them out, a trifle better, I venture to hope, than my neighbours could have done. I’ve had fifteen children, ma’am—fifteen children born and christened and vaccinated. Two of them lies up there in the churchyard yonder, bless ’em ! under the daisies ; one died at sea ; two of the girls are married, and have got young ones of their own ; and the rest, all but the five now at home, are out in good service, and smart lads and lasses they are, though I says it as shouldn’t.’

‘You have a wife living, Adam?’

‘Yes, ma’am, that I have; and Kezia and I have jogged on as well as most, and pulled through many a tight rub together. Kezia, ma’am, is a woman like this—she keeps herself to herself, and minds her home and her children, and we don’t never concern ourselves about other people’s affairs. Ah! ma’am, ’tis a mortal bad place, this Kettlebury Moor—a mortal bad place! Such a poor ignorant lot of heathen folk I never did see; and spite of all Mr. Wheeler (that’s our parson, ma’am) says to them Sunday after Sunday, and year after year, they go on just the same—a backbiting, ignorant, ne’er-do-well lot, to be sure. Kezia and I, we try, we do, to put ’em a bit right sometimes; but they haven’t a bit o’ sense in their heads, ma’am, and that’s the truth—not so much as a grain o’ sense in their poor foolish heads.’

‘Dear me, Adam! I’m sorry to hear you have such a bad opinion of your neighbours.’

‘Well you may be, ma’am. ’Tis the distressingest thing, to be sure. But there, we don’t choose our own neighbours, or this world would be a different sort of a place. So we must put up with ’em as we find ’em, and make the best of it. It’s a comfort to me, ma’am, to think that I’ve done my part, and shown ’em how a family may be brought up, to do credit to themselves and their friends; though, for the matter of that, ’tish’t every one’s children could turn out as smart lads as my James and my Henry. Tom, at home there, he’ll be as smart as the rest of them when his turn comes, though never was such an owdacious young pickle as the lad is now.’ And Adam laughed a self-congratulatory and well-pleased laugh.

Shakspeare describes a laugh that is as ‘thorns crackling under a pot.’ Such was not Adam’s laugh. It was a laugh peculiar to himself, like the short and sudden snap of a dried stick; not unlike in brevity and unexpectedness the sharp bark of a dog, but in sound resembling the crack of dried wood. His mirth over, he resumed the consideration of his own virtues

and his neighbours' shortcomings, which was one of his favourite subjects of contemplation, and the prolific text of many a discourse.

'Tisn't to be supposed, ma'am, that you, being a stranger in these parts, should know the character of the people you are come to live amongst; and sorry I am to say, that there's more than one upon Kettlebury Common fairspoken enough to your face, but bad enough in all conscience behind your back. I've lived here two-and-thirty years come Christmas, and I know, if any man knows, who's fair and who's foul, and it will always be my duty and pleasure, ma'am, to give you the benefit of any advice or information you may happen to require.'

'Thank you, Adam; but I always think the best plan is to believe people to be good until you find them out to be otherwise. We must hope that there are some exceptions amongst our Kettlebury folk. You said Mr. Wheeler was your clergyman, did you not?'

'Yes, ma'am; Mr. Wheeler has been our parson hard upon twenty years. He's a single gentleman, and lives at Hill Farm up yonder. A very nice sort of a gentleman is Mr. Wheeler, and makes uncommon good discourses; and I always will say so, though there are those who go against him, and say he's too much taken up with his pen and his book for a parson. But I always stand up for Mr. Wheeler, I do.'

'You have a schoolmaster or mistress, I suppose?'

'Yes, ma'am, we have a schoolmistress: Mrs. Primwell, the folks be pleased to call her now; though she was always Betty Primwell till Mr. Wheeler said the children would think more of her by t'other name. I don't see myself what difference it makes, for we all know that Betty Primwell knew no more than the rest of us till Mr. Wheeler set about teaching her a little writing and 'rithmetic. 'Tisn't much people learn when they're hard upon forty years old; but it keeps the children out of harm, you see, ma'am, and there's something in that Mr. Wheeler, he has a mortal high opinion of Betty Primwell, and 'tisn't for Kezia and me

to be setting ourselves up to know more than our betters; so whatever we think, we don't wish to have nothing to say about the matter, ma'am : ' and, overcome by his own humility, Adam's chin was again enfolded in his hand, and he returned to the contemplation of the carpet.

'Well, Adam, I want you to make enquiries about a pony for me—a quiet animal, a trifle better-looking than Tim, which I may myself be able to drive. And then, as to servants—do you think I shall be able to hear of some in Kettlebury? I wish to find servants who have some knowledge of their duties. Molly has been telling me of one or two, but they appear never before to have lived in service.'

'Bless you, no, ma'am! Poor old Molly, she don't know no more than a baby what's suiting for a gentleman's house. Don't you see, ma'am, it's like this: she never set foot out of her own cottage till the old master found her out, one day, and thought she'd be a quiet sort of a body to have about the place. But, to be sure, she's ignorance itself; and if so be that you told her to do anything more than boil a 'tatie or a turnip, she'd be 'most 'mazed, Molly would. Not that I wish to say anything against Molly. She's a tidy enough body now, whatever she may have been in past times, and we'll let bygones be bygones. And as to her ignorance—we're all ignorant till we grow wise, and some on us don't never grow wise. What you want, ma'am, is a smart, dapper lass like my Susan or Kezia. Ah! them would have been the servants for you, ma'am; and Susan's not altogether over well pleased with her place, as she put on the very last letter ever we got from her. I suppose you couldn't wait for a week or two, ma'am.'

'O no! impossible!' said Gabrielle, hastily. 'I may have visitors at any moment, and if poor Molly can cook nothing but turnips and potatoes, my guests will think I mean to starve them. You shall drive us into Kettlebury this afternoon, Adam, and we will see what we can do about it. Do you think Jem Fry will lend us Tim once more for a consideration?'

'Not a doubt but he will, ma'am;' and Adam having received full directions, made a deep reverence and departed.

'Cecilia,' said Gabrielle, when Adam was gone, 'my views respecting Nanny and Joan have undergone a revolution since breakfast-time. I plainly perceive that you were right and I was wrong. They shall be unsophisticated, if possible, but they must also be capable and well trained. If we cannot procure them in Kettlebury, we must endeavour to do so at the nearest large town, where there will probably be some sort of institution or establishment for the purpose. I cannot allow my house and my guests, and indeed myself, to be victimised for the furtherance of Adam's and Molly's private ends.'

Miss Tudor acquiesced, without any outward expression of satisfaction; but it must be owned that in her heart she felt infinitely relieved by the announcement.

Having superintended some necessary household arrangements, condoled with Holford on the incompleteness of the household linen, promising to make good all deficiencies, and relieved Molly's anxieties by the information that cold poultry and ham were to be found in one of the hampers still unpacked, Gabrielle felt herself free to take an hour's stroll before the early dinner, and resolved to find her way to the little knot of cottages which she had observed lying under the hill, when she gazed from her bedroom-window in the morning.

The day was cloudless, and Gabrielle forgot her household vexations at the first breath of balmy air, the first flower that met her eye. Leaving her own grounds, she found herself on a road with a heath-bound bank, surmounted with feathery birch-trees on her left hand, and on her right a raised pathway, rough and irregular, the delight of the passing child. From this rugged pathway descended a slope, covered with gorse and heath, terminating in a picturesque piece of broken ground, half pasturage, half bog. After a time

the road curved into a tiny hollow, where some half-dozen cottages sheltered themselves in a grove of apple and cherry trees. A stream ran in the bottom, and the ingenuity of Adam had directed its course in such a manner as to produce a clear fall of water for the use of the cottage community.

Adam's garden lay a little below the level of the road. Red, pink, and yellow hollyhocks peeped on tip-toe over the hawthorn hedge that divided it from the road, and many a gay dahlia embellished the gooseberry-bushes and currant-trees, the plots of cabbages, and ranks of scarlet-runners, with which the garden was skilfully stocked. This garden lay behind the cottage, but it was not until Gabrielle reached the house, which faced the main road at the point where her own road joined it, that she knew by the groceries displayed in the tiny window, and the name painted over the door, that it belonged to her own ingenious and consequential factotum.

Rainbow Cottage—for so it had been named by the joint effort of the united brain of Clack—was truly a humble dwelling wherein to have reared so many self-sufficient and sharp-witted members of the State. It consisted of but a small kitchen and closet on the ground-floor, and a limited bedroom and ante-room above. It was indeed matter for astonishment that so many thriving specimens of humanity could have been packed away night after night in health and safety, in so confined a space. But in my lord's servants'-hall, when Jeames favoured his co-mates with an allusion to 'my father's farm,' the closet below was dignified with the appellation of 'the best parlour,' while the ante-room above, though guiltless of door, and lighted by but a single pane of glass, not observable from without, would have felt doubtful of its own identity under the imposing title of 'our spare bedroom.'

Yet fifteen little tongues had found space to clack beneath that limited area of thatch. Not, indeed, all at the same time; for James had already worked his way into good service before the appearance of Ange-

lina. Angelina was the youngest member of the family ; for since the birth of James and Elizabeth, the Clacks had enlarged their ideas as to what was genteel and what vulgar in Christian names. The rude embers on the hearth had lit up many a merry group. . Adam, by turns playfully indulgent and parentally severe, would sit in the corner of the familiar settle, which constant use kept bright as the squire's polished oaken staircase. Kezia, on the opposite side, would hold a stocking on her hand, and darn it by the light of the one tallow dip on the table behind her ; while Clacks of all ages, in garments, like Joseph's, of many colours, clustered round father and mother, on small rickety chairs and three-legged stools, as close upon the glowing embers as but a slight consideration for safety would permit. The ruddy, uncertain light lit up a wooden dresser well trimmed with crockery, of which no three articles matched in size, shape, or colour. For ordinary use jugs without noses, teapots without handles, and dishes and mugs in various stages of dilapidation, helped to swell the goodly show, and abated not a whit Kezia's pride in the sound portion of her dresser crockery. Another side of the room was ornamented by a square chest of carved oak, standing on four stumpy legs, about a foot from the ground. It had belonged to Adam's grandfather, and many an antiquarian would have given a fancy price for the piece of excellent carved work that contained Kezia's eggs, apples, bread, and odds and ends of housewifery. Two ghastly subjects of vivid colouring in black frames, their surface varnished to save the expense and risk of glass, hung against the wall, and looked more like caricatures than representations of Bible history ; the one exhibiting the horrors of the Deluge, the other supposed to be Daniel in the Lion's Den.

Cocks and hens, and an occasional brood of young ducklings, were recognised members of the Clack family circle. Occasionally, when gate and door had been left 'unhapsed,' the old sow would lumber in with a complaisant grunt, when Tom would be forced to

leave his cosy seat, and the lighted stick he fondly imagined to be a cigar, and go and turn the visitor out. Father, mother, pigs, and children—they were a contented household, and in their own rough fashion sincerely believed Rainbow Cottage to be

A midway station given
For happy spirits to alight,
Betwixt the earth and heaven.

Kezia was at present from home, having gone to attend Kettlebury market; so Gabrielle merely stepped inside for a few minutes to reconnoitre the interior of Adam's home.

Perhaps it may as well here be stated, what Gabrielle only learnt by slow degrees, that notwithstanding Adam's virtuous indignation over the shortcomings of his neighbours, and the modest complacency with which he attested his own and Kezia's superiority, yet Rainbow Cottage was generally believed to be the very centre of gossip, and the seed-plot of scandal for Kettlebury Common. Kezia, though by her husband's account a very Lucretia, was said by less partial critics to delight in nothing so much as to tell and to hear some new thing; and Adam's multifarious occupations, and the attraction of the shop, afforded plentiful opportunities for indulging this propensity. Yet Adam's overweening self-esteem, and the dread of Kezia's tongue, kept critical neighbours at a distance, and the Clacks held undisputed sway over the hamlet of S. Anne's; and since no power has ever been bountiful enough 'the giftie' to 'gie us' that we might for once 'see ourselves as others see us,' there is no reason for impugning Adam's good faith in such articles of his belief as concerned the immaculateness of the whole family of Clack.

Gabrielle, wishing to patronise the shop, proceeded to purchase a bottle of pineapple drops, guiltless of pineapple, and having ascertained from Alice Clack, the child of eleven left in charge, that the school was just down the road, proceeded on her investigations.

The school was a cheerful whitewashed cottage, lying at the foot of the sombre pine-forest that sheltered the hollow. A hedge overgrown with periwinkle bounded the path from the wicket-gate to the door, and in front of the house was a cottage garden crowded with flowers, with a row of thatched beehives—the inevitable ornament of moorland gardens—down one side.

The school was on the point of dispersing, and a crowd of chubby-faced children poured out upon her as she reached the door. Mrs. Primwell's bright face appeared in the rear, her cheeks still rosy with the tints of health and activity, though the whitening hair, curled up beneath her goffered cap, proved her to have left youth behind. She wore a print dress, which descended no lower than her ankles, while a pink and lilac checked handkerchief was crossed over her chest. Shenstone's lively portrait of 'The Village Dame' might be, not inaptly, applied to her:—

Her cap far whiter than the driven snow,
Emblem right meet of decency does yield;
Her apron dyed in grain, as blue, I trowe,
As is the harebell that adorns the field:
And in her hand, for sceptre, she does wield
Tway birchen sprays, with anxious fear entwin'd.

Mrs. Primwell was no sparer of the rod, as many an indignant Kettlebury parent would testify; but her scholars were orderly, diligent, and well-mannered, and those who saw only the results, and whose hearts did not bleed over whaled shoulders and black and blue arms, considered her the very type of a village school-mistress. There was much to be said in defence of Mrs. Primwell's severity. The very parents who complained of it most loudly, would themselves in a fit of anger raise scars on the backs of their offspring that far outdid the stripes of the mistress. The children were permitted in rebellion at home, and being, from earliest infancy, inured to stringent measures, would have laughed at and snapped the silken thread of moral suasion. So Mrs. Primwell argued, and so Mr. Wheeler

believed, and let those only condemn them who, by milder measures, have arrived at the same result. They were adherents to a code that had wellnigh passed away, and it cannot be denied that many a ragged offspring of lawless parents turned out more intelligent, well-principled members of society than such an origin would have appeared to warrant.

'The lady from Heatherbrae, I believe, ma'am?' was Mrs. Primwell's salutation; and Gabrielle, having entrusted the pineapple drops to some of the elder children for division, was taken by the schoolmistress into the schoolroom to inspect samplers and copybooks. This done, the garden must be visited, as well as the pigs, poultry, and bees; the cows that supplied Heatherbrae with milk and butter, and the son and daughter whom the mother considered to be the backbone of the S. Anne's choir. The husband was smoking his mid-day pipe in the chimney-corner, the window-sill was full of flowering plants, a magpie hung in its wicker cage outside the door, the cat lay curled up in a favourite corner of the flower-bed, and Gabrielle came away thinking she had now seen as pleasant a picture of rural life as rural life could afford.

The afternoon was spent in the town of Kettlebury—a town that presented little wherewith to distinguish it from all other old-fashioned market-towns, unless it might be its picturesque situation, lying amidst vast hills clothed with luxuriance. The shops were limited in number, and still more limited in their resources; but Gabrielle was resolved to like everything that came out of Kettlebury, and the shopkeepers one and all liked the benevolent young lady who was so easily to be pleased. Native talent was employed to make up curtains, carpets, and bed-hangings, which had all been purchased in the town, and at the end of a fortnight Heatherbrae had assumed a home-like aspect, and Miss Hope was the most popular person in Kettlebury.

CHAPTER VIII.

I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me, and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities torture.—*Childe Harold*.

DURING the week that succeeded Gabrielle's first appearance at church, two visitors left their cards at Heatherbrae. Adam had driven her out for the purpose of trying a new pony, and Miss Tudor had accompanied them, and on their return the cards of the 'Reverend Daniel Wheeler, Kettlebury S. Anne's,' and 'Dr. Arnold Blyth, Kettlebury,' were found on the hall-table.

Gabrielle was sorry to have missed seeing Mr. Wheeler, but remembered with satisfaction that in the course of another week her uncle would be with her, and she should be in a position to make hospitable overtures to her neighbours.

Colonel and Miss Mostyn, with a lady's maid, and an infinite supply of luggage, arrived at Heatherbrae late one evening, Gabrielle having taken the precaution of sending Kettlebury's best fly and a pair of horses to meet them. The Colonel was a little—a very little—inclined to be irritable when he arrived; but politeness restrained him from displaying it otherwise than by a slight captiousness to his daughter, and an explosion of wrath at the mismanagement of the lady's-maid, which was received with silence and submission by that individual, who knew it to be only the Colonel's way, and a necessary vent for his ill-humour.

All clouds had cleared away by the morning, and Gabrielle having slightly postponed the breakfast-hour, Emma made an effort to oblige her cousin by being punctual.

'This place would be charming if it were only on the line some twenty or thirty miles from town,' she

observed, as she stood in the oriel window, and watched the smoke curling upwards from the homesteads in the hollow.

'I hope you will find it charming now,' said Gabrielle, from behind the tea-urn.

'I could fancy myself in Scotland,' said Colonel Mostyn. 'The view from my bedroom-window this morning reminded me strongly of the view from a cottage in the Highlands which we formerly used as a shooting-box, and which commanded a valley clothed with Scotch firs, much like your hill yonder—hill or mountain—I don't know which you may expect me to call it.'

'It is an old Roman encampment,' said Gabrielle, 'and whether you call it mountain, or hill, it forms a grand feature in our scenery, and it pleases me to fancy that it may stretch away for miles and miles into a Black-forest, or a prairie wilderness, or any other trackless solitude.'

'Why, surely, dear Gabrielle,' exclaimed Emma, 'we saw the end of it on the other side as we drove here from the station yesterday.'

'The end of it!' repeated Gabrielle, in a tone half thoughtful, half jocose. 'The end of it! O Emma! how like you! Where does imagination end?'

'Where common sense begins, I suppose,' said Emma, laughing.

'Not where wisdom begins,' said Gabrielle. 'Look at the smoke from those cottages in the valley. Common sense tells you, I suppose, that turnips and potatoes are boiling in the pot below, but imagination tells you a beautiful parable about sparks that fly upward, and blue smoke that soars and soars till it loses itself in ether, and a great deal more that you would laugh at.'

'I daresay I might be inclined to suggest that wisdom dwelt in the pot below,' said Emma.

'I won't dispute the point,' said Gabrielle. 'We must live; but because our food is shut into the pot, does it follow that our thoughts must be there also?'

'What happened when Alfred fell a-thinking over the cakes?'

'Now you have your answer self-invited,' said Gabrielle, laughing. 'Some minds are made to rule kingdoms and some to turn cakes.'

'I give you the last word,' said Emma, magnanimously. 'Is there a good neighbourhood here? archery parties, or picnics, or croquet?'

'I hope not; I have not heard of any. Indeed, as yet we know nothing of our neighbours. Our only visitors have been two gentlemen, both of whom we unfortunately missed.'

'Unfortunate, indeed! And pray do you know what Kettlebury gentlemen may be like?'

'I have seen Mr. Wheeler in Church: he is between fifty and sixty years of age, I should say, and I imagine Dr. Blyth to be a little younger.'

'Really! what acquisitions to any picnics you may feel disposed to give! I expect you will not be sorry to hear that you are likely to have a reinforcement of beaux from another quarter?'

'That depends upon circumstances—the quality of the article, and a few other considerations.'

'I don't think you will find fault with the quality. Papa met some mutual friends of ours a few days before we left town, and when they heard where you were gone, and where we were going (for we may share the honour between us), they were immediately seized with a frenzied desire to follow; and they have made papa promise to find some cottage or farmhouse near at hand, where they may lodge in the hope of obtaining some sport.'

'Sport of some kind or other,' said Colonel Mostyn, in a tone of would-be drollery.

'And pray, who are these gentlemen?' asked Gabrielle, with the air of one whose plans have been unceremoniously disarranged. 'I might have known, Emma, that you could go nowhere without a train of admirers.'

'I have no wish to appropriate them all,' said Emma. 'Now, Gabrielle, be candid, and tell me which, amongst

all your acquaintances, you would rather welcome to Kettlebury?’

‘If I had a choice, I certainly should not tell it. As it is, I think it highly improbable that any of your friends are favourites of mine.’

‘What should you say to Philip Arkwright, Harold Bushby, and one of the Rolfes?’

At this instant Gabrielle dropped a teaspoon and stooped to pick it up. A flush had overspread her face, attributable either to pleasure or vexation, and she knew well it would not pass unnoticed. She went on composedly pouring out the tea.

‘I am quite relieved, Gabrielle, to see that there is some sensibility left in you. You may remember that when I came to see you one day in Grosvenor Square, I was afraid you had forgotten how to blush.’

‘I remember you were uneasy on the subject. I am glad your anxieties are now relieved. Nothing is so becoming as a blush.’

Miss Tudor looked up, perplexed at the conversation, noted Gabrielle’s increased colour, and meditated in silence over her egg.

‘You express neither satisfaction nor annoyance,’ continued Emma, who was watching her cousin narrowly.

‘My expressing nothing does not prove anything.’

‘No; but your face is more expressive than your silence; you are either very glad or very sorry.’

‘Then, indeed, Emma, you know more than I know myself. I was just trying to find out whether the balance was in favour of joy or sorrow. Which feeling do you give me credit for?’

‘Well, I think you are very glad, though you won’t say so.’

‘I don’t mind saying so if I am, but I am afraid you are mistaken. It would be more polite to be glad, but unfortunately it doesn’t feel particularly like gladness. It may be an old-fashioned prejudice, but I fancy I should have liked to be asked beforehand whether I had begun to feel my retirement wearisome.’

‘It is old-fashioned, believe me; heiresses cannot bid adieu to the world in this pathetic manner, unless they are far older and more objectionable than yourself. It is the greatest compliment imaginable that your friends should be willing to follow you to the ends of the earth.’

‘Which of the Rolfes did you say was coming?’

‘Mr. Peter Rolfe—I suppose you would have preferred Charles. He is certainly more entertaining; but I like Peter Rolfe much better this season than I did before, and I think I may say that the liking is mutual. We have been very good friends latterly.’

‘I am glad to hear it. Will Mrs. Arkwright ever consent to part with Philip? I thought she went nowhere without him.’

‘I don’t know how that has been arranged. The Arkwrights are all going to Bournemouth, and Philip said nothing should induce him to accompany them. He will break through the leading-strings now, I suspect, and Mrs. Arkwright will be not unwilling that he should dance attendance on the wealthy Miss Hope.’

‘Be just, Emma: Philip, with all his faults, is no fortune-hunter.’

‘You ask no questions about Harold Bushby.’

‘Questions seemed superfluous—I was so certain you could not help telling me all you knew about him.’

‘I haven’t much to tell. Of course he was the originator of the plan. It was just like one of his wild schemes. He was in a deplorable state of mind when he discovered that you had quietly dropped off the stage, and that no one knew what had become of you. He tried to console himself with Lady Lester’s pretty niece, but that wouldn’t do; and when he heard we were going to join you, he made a vow not to be long behind us.’

‘Do you know of any house or cottage where they can be received?’ asked Colonel Mostyn.

‘No, indeed, I do not, unless there are vacant rooms at the farm where Mr. Wheeler lodges. I dare say Adam may know.’

'And who is Adam?' asked Emma.

'Who is Adam!' repeated Gabrielle. 'To think, Cecilia, that only a fortnight ago we were ourselves saying "Who is Adam?" Adam, Emma, to describe him in few words, is the old farmer of Tilsbury Vale;

All trades, as need was, did old Adam assume,
Served as stable-boy, errand-boy, porter, and groom.

Add to these occupations, clerk, sexton, postman, waiter, and coachman, general purveyor to the hamlet, and a host of minor offices that it would take too long to enumerate.'

'And pray, who may a worthy soul be who goes about in short skirts, with a handkerchief across her chest? She and, I suppose, this identical Adam, brought up our luggage last evening, and the good lady stood by with arms akimbo, looking on while Lake unpacked some of the boxes. I asked her whether she knew where we could procure a turnscREW, in order to open one of the boxes that had been screwed down, and she replied, with an energy that quite startled me, that "she didn't know no more than the dead!" Is that a common phrase in these parts?'

'I am sure I can't tell,' said Gabrielle, smiling. 'I have heard Molly make use of it. I look upon Adam and Molly as legacies from my grandfather. Holford has caught so much of *bon ton* as never to be surprised at anything, so that I find Molly's phrases and ejaculations, which are generally far beyond the occasion, quite refreshing.'

'Can we make enquiries to-day at the house you mention?' asked her uncle. 'I should like to write to Bushby by to-morrow's post, at latest.'

'Suppose we walk to Moor Farm this morning,' suggested Gabrielle, 'and leave cards on Mr. Wheeler. Cecilia, will you go with us? I believe it is not very far; perhaps a mile, or a little more.'

The walk was agreed upon, but proved a more serious undertaking than Gabrielle expected, for Colonel Mostyn was somewhat stiff from rheumatism and past attacks of

gout, and the deliberation and pomposity of his ordinary movements were not, as his niece had imagined, wholly attributable to dignity of deportment, but owed some of their origin to stiffness of joint.

The farm in question stood on a higher point of the moor than Heatherbrae, and commanded a superb view. The moor stretched away on either side, tinged with a rich hue of russet-purple, and the fresh breeze in the morning was exhilarating. Many a thatched roof lay hid in dell and dingle, their locality indicated by the faint blue smoke from peat fires—

Where Corydon and Thyrsis met
Are at their savoury dinner set,
Of herbs, and other country messes.

Gorse blossoms lingered amid the purple heath, and ferns sprang up amongst the white flints, while a solitary fir-tree here and there broke the outline of the moor. Larks upsprang from their lowly nests, and soared with sweet song, well-nigh out of sight. A rabbit here and there coursed timorously from bush to bush, and the 'pee-wit' of the lapwing sounded alluringly on either side.

There was not much conversation during the walk, for Colonel Mostyn found himself more out of breath than he cared to betray, and Gabrielle was absorbed in enjoyment of the mountain air, and silent admiration of the scene. The farm lay just beneath the crest of the hill, and when they reached the entrance Emma was the first to speak :—

'A desolate region, Gabrielle ! How could your grandfather select such a spot for his home ? I see no trace of neighbours on either hand.'

'My grandfather's taste was like my own, I suppose. If one chose a home with reference only to neighbours, it would be necessary to bind them down never to depart, and that plan might sometimes have its drawbacks.'

'I would rather have quarrelsome neighbours than

none at all. However, it is very healthy here, and, in a certain way, picturesque; and when our sportsmen arrive, we shall be able to find a little variety in quarrelling and making it up again. I wish your roads were not so flinty; no vehicle could pass over them.'

'There is a better road, Adam informs me, but it makes a circuit of half a mile, so I thought you would prefer this one, rough as it is.'

The incumbent of Kettlebury S. Anne's was a bachelor, somewhat past middle age. He was of average stature; but much reading, and a habit of constant meditation, had produced a stoop of the head and shoulders which detracted from his height. If encountered in one of the long country walks which afforded him the keenest delight, he was to be seen walking along with his gaze bent on the ground, and his head held slightly on one side. This peculiarity of carrying his head on one side became more striking when he was engaged in conversation, and but for the gentle benignity of his countenance, which forbade an irreverent thought in his presence, would have appeared ludicrous. Yet although in purity of life, and personal goodness, Mr. Wheeler was justly regarded as a model of the Anglican clergyman, there were many who felt that the common-room of his college would have been a sphere more congenial to the Fellow of forty years' standing, than the office of pastor to a flock so lawless and undisciplined as that of S. Anne's. He was a man of deep reading and profound thought, but his mind was more absorbed in such subjects as the contest between ritualism and rationalism, the vexed question of Church and State, the anomalies of the Irish Church, and the disunion of the Church Catholic, than in the petty brawls of Churchman and Dissenter at his own door, the illicit gin-distilling of Jem Fry and his crew, and the falsehood, dishonesty and irreligion of three-fourths of his parishioners.

At Moor Farm, in two dusky rooms, stored with books and festooned with cobwebs, this child at heart; but philosopher in mind, dwelt in an imaginary world

of his own. Some years previously he had been offered a college living of considerable value, but one which would make far more urgent calls on his time and attention than S. Anne's; and having neither child nor relative whose interest he was bound to consider, he unhesitatingly declined it. No pecuniary advantage could have atoned to him for the loss of such unbroken retirement as he enjoyed at S. Anne's, or for the sacrifice of the leisure hours for reading and reflection which suited his thoughtful cast of mind and the habit of long years. But, although by nature retiring, Mr. Wheeler was no misanthrope. Whenever he had an opportunity of associating with kindred minds, he cheerfully quitted his hermitage, and, holding with Shakspeare that 'one touch of nature makes the whole world kin,' he was willing to admit a claim to kinship wherever he found an unsophisticated mind refined by education and good-breeding.

There was little in common between the deeply-read man and profound thinker, and Colonel Mostyn, who never perused anything but a newspaper, and whose thoughts skimmed but lightly the surface of topics of the day. Mr. Wheeler soon devoted himself to the ladies of the party. He was not incapable of appreciating a sweet face and a soft accent, though his heart, it was believed, had never given itself over to a woman's keeping. There was nothing paternal in his behaviour to ladies. His was rather the gallantry of a bygone generation, showing itself in courteous speeches, and an air of gentle deference to their opinion. He had that chivalrous feeling towards women which is the inevitable result of a pure life. He seemed to divine intuitively that Miss Hope was of a temperament more congenial to his own than was her cousin; or it may have been that his benevolent glance penetrated the outer crust of good manners with an unusual keensightedness. Be that as it may, his geniality in the present instance was devoted to her, and was received in as cordial a spirit as it was offered.

'I am exceedingly glad to make acquaintance with

the granddaughter of my dear old friend,' he observed, in the subdued tone habitual to him. 'Mr. Erakine and myself were intimate friends and associates, and although I cannot hope to be as good company to a young lady as to an elderly gentleman, I hope I may still claim the title of friend for the sake of him who is gone.'

'Indeed, you will be my most welcome guest at Heatherbrae, if you will bear with my follies for the sake of his wisdom,' said Gabrielle, with the gracious sweetness of voice and manner that peculiarly belonged to her. 'I was not happy enough to know much of my grandfather after I was nine years of age, so that I am the more anxious to hear of him now; and as I wish to carry out his views as far as possible, I must come to you for direction.'

'Whatever aid it may be in my power to give; shall be yours at all times and at any season,' he replied. 'I want to know whether you are pleased with your moorland home?'

'I am—I love Heatherbrae already, and I feel sure that every year will make me love it more and more.'

'It will, there can be no doubt about it. Only those who have dwelt amidst fine scenery can understand the hold it takes upon the affections. I would not exchange Drumbleton Fort yonder, with its robe of perpetual verdure, for the fairest scenery in the world. And why is this?—because I have learnt to look upon it as a familiar object—a friend, a home; and love, as we all know, is a more enduring and pleasure-giving sensation than mere admiration.'

'I could never give a preference to pine scenery,' said Emma. 'It is so cold and cheerless.'

'Only to unfamiliar eyes,' rejoined Mr. Wheeler, in his quiet tone. 'It is undoubtedly less brilliant in summer, but when we have the whole wealth of summer sunshine and summer flowers, and when the moor is outspread with tints of purple and gold, like a kingly carpet, we rest our eyes without disappointment on the sombre hues of our fir-clad hills. On the other hand, when winter strips the brighter portion of nature of her

glories, our pine-wood remains constant and unchangeable—no fair-weather friend, but a true and tried ally.’

‘No nation is so passionately attached to home as the Swiss,’ observed Gabrielle; ‘and possibly their ever-green foliage serves to endear it to them as much as the mountainous character of the country.’

‘The Highlanders again,’ added Mr. Wheeler, ‘feel the same devotion to home and country. The Scotch fir, a tree which to English eyes seems to lack warmth and geniality, does not wear the same aspect to them. It is true we cannot boast the rich and varied tints which glorify the woods in autumn, yet even here we are spared a regretful feeling, such as one might experience in listening to the sweetness of the swan’s last lay; and when winter robes the ground in white, and decorates the boughs with snow-crystals, our pine has all to gain and nothing to lose. It never looks more lovely than when freighted with snow.’

‘Ever since I came to Heatherbrae,’ said Gabrielle, ‘I have been haunted by the idea that I was at the sea-side. Sometimes I distinctly hear the ripple of the tide, and the breaking of waves on the sea-shore. I cannot divest myself of the impression that the sea must be somewhere close at hand.’

‘I remember being pursued by the same idea when I first came to S. Anne’s,’ replied Mr. Wheeler. ‘The sound is caused by the sighing of the wind in the pine-trees—a gentle and agreeable sound in summer, but a grand and solemn one when the winter blast surges through the forest, wailing over the tree-tops, and sobbing amid the branches. Habit has made the sound so familiar, that I now scarcely notice it. But I remember being struck with a passage in Cowper which alludes to the resemblance it bears to waves on the shore. I will find it for you.’

Mr. Wheeler took a volume from the bookshelf, and read the passage aloud:—

Mighty winds,
That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood
Of ancient growth, make music not unlike
The dash of ocean on his winding shore,
And lull the spirit while they fill the mind.

‘They do fill the mind,’ said Gabrielle, thoughtfully ; ‘or at least they awaken into life the thoughts that are lying dormant in the mind. The music of the breeze makes a kind of accompaniment to one’s thoughts, like the soft notes of a guitar, harmonising, and not clashing, with the tones of a voice.’

‘I am so glad you have found a congenial spirit in Mr. Wheeler, Gabrielle,’ said Emma. ‘Perhaps if you can talk to him in poetry, you may be considerate enough to converse with your relatives in prose, out of compassion for their limited capacities.’

‘It is impossible to converse about nature in prose,’ said Mr. Wheeler, softly. ‘A subject so full of poetry instinctively leads us to the use of poetic language, and even then we know well that no language of ours can adequately express the poetry enfolded in a single bud or blossom of nature’s moulding.’

‘But I fear the gentlemen on whose behalf we have come to-day,’ persisted Emma, ‘will desire some rather prosaic arrangements for a month’s sojourn here. Pray, Gabrielle, do you mean them to live on bilberries and plover’s eggs, and sleep under a gorse-bush?’

‘Heatherbrae will provide them with something more substantial than bilberries,’ replied Gabrielle, ‘and I hope Mr. Wheeler’s landlady may be able to supply them with beds.’

Mr. Wheeler immediately promised that some vacant rooms, which were sometimes placed at the disposal of his friends, should be at the service of any friends of Miss Hope, and presently the farmer’s wife was summoned to a consultation, and the necessary arrangements concluded.

Mr. Wheeler accompanied his visitors down the footpath by which they had approached the farm, and received from Gabrielle a cordial invitation to her house, where she assured him he would at all times be welcome. When he had left them, and was far out of hearing, the Colonel shrugged his shoulders. ‘What a life ! Poring over books in that fusty, musty den ! It reminds me of nothing so much as a live toad imbedded in stone.’

How time must hang on hand in such a place ! every day must appear a week.'

'Don't hurt Gabrielle's feelings, papa,' observed Emma. 'This is the very life she has been pining for for years. She considers it the very acme of human bliss.'

'I have not a doubt that it is a very happy life,' said Gabrielle. 'You cannot talk to Mr. Wheeler without seeing that he extracts happiness from everything around him. And his happiness is real ; it is not dependent on the caprice of friend or neighbour, nor even on the caprice of fortune. It will ripen, too, as age steals on him, whereas most persons' happiness declines with age. I think every year I live increases my love for nature—certainly I have not lived many years in the world, but I have lived long enough to feel sure of this.'

'Well, Gabrielle,' said Colonel Mostyn, 'let us see whether six months at Heatherbrae increases your love for nature, or whether it does not, on the contrary, revive your slumbering affection for the world.'

Gabrielle laughed ; a soft, low laugh—'We shall see.'

CHAPTER IX.

And forth into the fields I went,
And Nature's living pulses lent
The pulse of hope to discontent.—*Tennyson.*

Earth's crammed with Heaven
And every common bush a-fire with God ;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes —
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

E. B. Browning.

'GABRIELLE,' said Emma, one morning, 'I cannot say that I admire your taste in the choice of a table-cover.'

Gabrielle smiled, raised her eyes for an instant to the

cloth of plain green, with a yellow border, that covered her drawing-room table, and observed, 'There is nothing to dislike about it; it is very neat. I had a reason for choosing it.'

'I saw some exquisite cloths in London the day before I left home,' continued Emma. 'I wish you had written to me for one. May I venture to ask what your reason for buying that one could have been?'

'You would not understand it if I told you.'

'You are very complimentary. Miss Tudor, should you have supposed me to be a crétin? I suppose it is a poetic reason, and you think I have no soul for anything but prose. Perhaps the tint is in harmony with the pine-trees, or it exercises some soothing influence on your spirit, which red or blue would have marred. Have I guessed right?'

'Quite wrong; the reason had no special reference to my own tastes. You said years ago that I was odd, and since this fortune came to me I have been odder than ever.'

'A fortune like yours will cover a few oddities. You bought the table-cover in Kettlebury, I suppose, with the rest of the furniture. Now do, Gabrielle, tell me why you bought it?'

'If you must know, because it had been a long time in the shop.'

'Are table-covers, like port-wine, the better for keeping?'

'I think not; certainly Kettlebury people don't consider them so. This one in particular was what they call rather shop-worn.'

'O! then you got it a bargain?'

'No; I gave the full price.'

'What an infatuation! You must have done it to ingratiate yourself with the Kettlebury folk.'

'I hope not. I bought it, as I said before, because it had been a long time in the shop, and I thought no one else would do so.'

'Do you cater for your household on the same principle?'

‘No; you would be justified in calling me something worse than odd if I did. My table-cover was of no importance to anyone but myself, and economy is no object to me, otherwise I might perhaps have sent to London for one; so I thought there would be more kindness in taking off some of the stock the upholsterer had on hand, than in making him procure me fresh goods from town.’

‘I don’t believe anyone but Ella would have thought of such a thing,’ said Cecilia, affectionately.

‘I really don’t believe they would,’ said Emma. ‘I am glad to find that after all I am not the crétin. I wonder the house looks so comfortable after being furnished on such a principle. I must own that I thought these heavy crimson curtains were none of your own choosing, but a legacy from your grandfather.’

‘So they were. When he left me Heatherbrae and his fortune, he left me the task of considering the welfare of the Kettlebury people.’

‘What is that pretty book in a violet cover that you have upon the table, Gabrielle? Is it a new kind of photographic album?’

‘An album, but not for photographs. I have had it for some years, and I find every year that it increases in interest. I shall expect you to leave me a reminiscence of yourself and your sentiments.’

‘My sentiments!’ exclaimed Emma; ‘I don’t know that I have any. Do you mean to say that the contributions are original, and in poetry?’

‘Not original; for in that case my album would get on but slowly—at the same time I expect them to be characteristic. The writer must be prepared to endorse the opinion of the author, and affix his name to the extract.’

‘Characteristic!’ repeated Emma, meditatively, as she slowly turned over the leaves of the album. ‘Are all these extracts supposed to be characteristic of the writers? This one, for instance—

‘We weep while joys and sorrows both are fading from our view,
To find wherever sunbeams fall the shadow cometh too.’

‘That was written by one who had proved it to be true,’ said Gabrielle. ‘You did not know her, Emma; she stayed with us at Headworthy, and now she is in India.’

‘And who is F. K.? and in what way can these lines be characteristic?—

Beloved, let us love so well,
Our love shall still be better for our work,
And still our work be sweeter for our love.’

A faint colour tinged Gabrielle’s cheek as she replied, ‘You did not know F. K. either. That was written some years ago. I suppose to some people love and work are the mainsprings of life. They are comprehensive terms.’

‘Very much so. Is “beloved” a comprehensive term, too—in the sense of “beloved brethren”? Who may the beloved be that F. K. is addressing here?’

‘My contributors address whom they please,’ said Gabrielle; ‘and as the name is not given in the album, it still remains enshrined in the breast of F. K. This is all I can tell you.’

‘All you will tell me, you mean. Is F. K. a man or a woman?’

‘A quadruped, I rather think. To all the facts you can discover from the book itself you are welcome, Emma; but when friends of mine have chosen to conceal their identity by the use of initials, I will never be the one to strip them of their disguise.’

‘Very well; I turn over the page in submissive obedience—but O, F. K.! no member of the fairer sex ever brought colour to the cheek of my cousin Gabrielle as you have done! I see some one has inscribed a proverb instead of a verse. May I do the same?’

Having received permission, Emma mended a pen and entered her contribution:—

‘There is no wisdom in being miserable to-day because we may chance to be so to-morrow.

‘EMMA MOSTYN.’

'Very characteristic,' said Gabrielle, smiling, as Emma held the book before her eyes. 'But from what Uncle Henry said at breakfast-time, I should think by to-morrow your happiness would rather have increased than decreased.'

'Did Colonel Mostyn say his friends were expected to arrive here to-day, Ella?' asked Miss Tudor.

'Yea, he said so. I have sent Adam to the farm with a note requesting the pleasure of their company at dinner, if they should arrive in time.'

'Quite a Lady Bountiful!' said Emma. 'I should like, above all things, to know to whom the note was addressed.'

'Should you? perhaps you can guess.'

'Either to Mr. Arkwright or Mr. Rolfe; I am quite at a loss to say which.'

'It does not much matter which you say,' said Gabrielle, composedly; 'for either way you would be wrong.'

'You actually addressed it to Mr. Bushby!'

'Why should I not address it to Mr. Bushby? He was the originator of the scheme, and is the elder of the trio. And now, Emma, a word in season. I have allowed you hitherto to amuse yourself at my expense, because, as the saying goes, it amused you and it didn't hurt me; but the case will be different now. Any levity or manœuvring henceforth will annoy me, and force me at once to close Heatherbrae gates to any gentleman under sixty years of age.'

'Observe, Miss Tudor,' exclaimed Emma, 'how skillfully Mr. Wheeler is protected from exclusion, and, for aught I know, this dear old Kettlebury doctor!'

'Joking is almost always in bad taste,' continued Gabrielle, quietly, 'and particularly so in my case. I have neither father, mother, brother, nor sister to give strength to my position, so I am bound to defend it myself.'

'You have nothing to fear from me, Gabrielle; I will be on my best behaviour.'

'I hope you will, Emma; and while we are on the

subject, I may as well add that even some of your allusions to Mr. Wheeler are offensive to me. His grey hairs ought to protect him from such nonsense; and as I wish to regard him as a particular friend, I will not have our friendship marred by any folly.'

'You are pleased to lay down the law, Gabrielle,' said Emma, with some displeasure, 'and of course in your own house I am bound to submit.'

'In my own house, or any other, if we are to be friends as well as cousins,' said Gabrielle. 'My requests are not unreasonable. By the bye, where is Uncle Henry? I have not seen him since breakfast.'

'I think he is in the garden still, and that reminds me that an hour ago he told me to come to him in half-an-hour,' said Emma, nothing loth to bring the conversation to a conclusion.

When she was gone, Miss Tudor crossed the room, and seated herself near Gabrielle, with her work in her hand, and her face working nervously.

'Dear Ella, we have known so little of each other for the last few years, that I feel I cannot stand to you in the position that I ought. You are wiser than I am already, and more experienced in the ways of the world; and I never could do much for my friends, except love them and try to serve them. But when I see, as I often do, that you feel the want of mother and sister, I long to be to you all that such a poor insignificant person can be. When Barbara died, and I was left alone in the world, with no one who cared for me or my love, your letter came to me like a sudden burst of hope. We both loved you always, as you well know, and I thought it must have been Providence that made you wish for me at such a time, just when all my love seemed to be thrown back on myself. And now, Ella, I don't expect too much, for I never was strong-minded like Barbara; but I thought I might just let you know that the only thing I have to live for is to be useful to you; and perhaps you may be glad sometimes to think how well I love you, even though I am not of enough importance to do you much good.'

'You don't know how much good you are doing me,' said Gabrielle, softly, for her voice always sank under the pressure of strong feeling. 'I need sympathy and love far more than counsel and protection. The loneliness of my life—I mean of the true life that is unseen—has made me reserved; for I have seldom known what it was to be able to speak freely of the things I most cared about. Subjects on which other girls laugh and jest, are to me too serious for jesting. It is not with me as it is with them. Most girls when they marry gain much, but they also give up much. When I marry, if ever I do, I shall give up nothing, unless it be some of my headstrong will, and I shall gain everything. I shall be forming the one tie of my life; for never, since I became a woman, have I known any link nearer than aunt or cousin. With me it must be a turning-point—the making or the marring of my happiness. Sometimes I scarcely dare think of it; I seldom speak of it; and I could never, never jest about it.'

'I shall not love you the less for that, Ella. It accords with all my own notions of what a woman should feel; and I would never even wish for your confidence, unless you felt that to confide in a true friend might give you comfort. I could not give you the advice of a married woman; and although I will not say that I never knew what love was, yet my own love days are so long past that they seem to me only like a story I once listened to, and I can now think of them almost without pain.'

'I am afraid I shall be making a selfish compact,' said Gabrielle; 'you are to give me everything, and I am to give you nothing. And yet I know I should be insincere if I promised more. I would not have you think me open when I know myself to be reserved, though such an admission must, I am afraid, check the warmth of your feelings towards me.'

'No, no,' said Cecilia, 'you give me all that I ask for. I have no claim upon your confidence, and perhaps after a time I may be able to find out ways of making myself useful to you. At present, you may feel certain that I

am true to you, heart and soul, Ella, and when you see other people taken up with their own interests it may be a comfort to you to know this.'

'And depend upon it, though I may not be able to give you my whole confidence at present, yet I will give you my love,' said Gabrielle, kissing the kind face that bore traces of care and sorrow in many a line, albeit not one of those lines detracted from the gentleness that was its main characteristic. In truth, Gabrielle's heart reproached her for being able to give no more than love, but she was one who would have found it difficult to pour out an unreserved flow of feeling to any one standing in a relation less near to her than mother or sister. Having no such ties, the secrets of her heart remained locked up in her heart, until time or circumstance should mature them to bear the broad light of day and the gaze of curious eyes.

To-day, the repose that had seemed to settle on her spirit ever since her arrival at Heatherbrae, had taken its departure. Whether ruffled by the expected visit of guests who would probably bring with them some of the atmosphere of the busy world; or whether painful thoughts which had begun to slumber had been awakened to life by the conversation with Emma and Miss Tudor, it matters not. Calmness had forsaken her, and, the hour of luncheon over, she rose from table with the half-smothered sigh of one whose spirit has been under a restraint which has at length been removed.

'Where are you going, Gabrielle?' asked Emma, as her cousin, with her hat on, prepared to leave the house.

'I am going out, by myself, somewhere in the direction of Drumbleton Fort. Make yourself at home, Emma. Adam and the pony-chaise are quite at your service.'

'Have you made any arrangements about meeting our friends?'

'Certainly not; what arrangements should I make? They are your guests, not mine. Uncle Henry will make what arrangements he pleases for them.'

'Have you any objection to our being driven by Adam to the Kettlebury Road Station, to see whether they arrive?'

'None in the world. They will be flattered by such tender solicitude for their welfare.'

Emma bit her lip, and returned to the drawing-room; and Gabrielle departed, a little soothed by the harmless shaft she had just despatched.

To some temperaments there is always peace and refreshment to be gained from the enjoyment of 'solitude's sequestered store;' and more particularly so when solitude is found amid scenes of vigour and beauty, where knoll and fell, upland and hollow, imperceptibly draw the mind away from the contemplation of self. Gabrielle could never turn a deaf ear to the voice of nature. She had inherited from her father a passionate love for the picturesque and sublime; and no less had she derived a taste for pure pastoral pleasures from the mother who passed among country scenes the lonely hours which her husband was spending in foreign lands and less innocent pleasures.

On she strolled by fern and heather, over flinty pathways, for some time in silent thought. At length on a grassy slope that skirted the pine-wood, she found a sheltered seat facing south, where the sun played upon her in front, and the breeze swept through the branches above her. Before her lay a lovely spread of landscape. The cultivated lea, broken here and there by wooded ravines and sheltered homesteads, bore away to low pasture lands, where—

The bright broad river's gushing tide
Swept winding onwards far and wide.

The ground rose again on the opposite bank of the river, and merged into the blue hills that were a never-ceasing source of pleasure to her.

The disturbance of her mind soon began to subside. Her vexations, whatever they had been, lost their power to annoy, and her spirit rose every moment, with all the buoyancy of youth. Before long, feeling the want

of some external vent for the feelings pent up within her, she began to talk to herself in a low voice, a habit she had acquired in consequence of having had for some years no intimate friend who could sympathise with her inner life. She made a friend of herself, or perhaps, if truth were told, her imagination created a friend who should be to her as her very self, one to whom she could unreservedly pour out all the thoughts that filled her mind to overflowing.

‘What a change in my life!’ she said, softly. ‘Pure air to breathe, green trees to rest my eyes upon, a blue sky undimmed by city smoke, and only made more beautiful by those tiny clouds that float by so lazily; sweet country sounds of labour, and of animal life, and even of insect industry; and then the fragrance of the earth, and the common flowers! I could sit and dream my life away in this delicious idleness. O this nature! this kind, bountiful nature, I feel why she is called Mother Nature. She is my mother, the nearest approach to a mother that I can well remember. Next to a Heavenly Father, is this sympathetic, heart-reviving, soul-stirring nature. She spreads her treasures at my feet, she sings to me from every bush and bough, she touches my forehead with a soft breeze that soothes me like the touch of a mother’s fingers. She is wafting to me now a perfume more exquisite than any I ever yet met with; it comes from the sober pine-trees: a pure sweet smell that no art could ever retain, and no skill convey: so delicate, so slight, so fresh and fragrant, it makes the very recollection of artificial scents distasteful. Mother Nature, you tell me stories of a purer age, sweet stories that bring back to me a feeling of happiness I have not known for many a year. And your simple tales are true—they are the very truth. You lead me upward and onward, upward through the blue æther, onward through grief and pain, to the fair land, the golden shore, the crystal sea, which our fondest visions can only picture as nature glorified, freed from sin, freed from sorrow, flooded with the radiance of the great white Throne. Ah! nature you will surely be ours still

when we reach that far-off land ! Is it so very far off ? Who can tell ?—nearer, far nearer here than in the busy heedless town. It may be very near, perhaps close at hand, here in the whispering breeze, here in the stillness that so teems with life, here amid—

Such sounds as make deep silence in the heart,
For Thought to do her part.

‘ Mother Nature, tell me some of your stories ; carry me back to the days when the sun always shone, and the birds always sang. A daisy at my feet ! nothing but a daisy, the commonest flower that blows, but it reminds me of daisy-days when life was a long fairy tale in meadows of gold and silver. When the mossy boles of the trees were full of wonders, when weeds were forests, and a tuft of primroses made a gay parterre. Days when life promised to be so beautiful, when energy was to override all obstacles, when the noble being who was sure to come to make life the perfect whole, was but wandering about over the flowery earth, seeking the unknown one, whom he could not fail to find at last ; daisy-days, when a thoughtless word lay heavy on the tender conscience, and when a smile or a blessing would be enough of joy for the heart to rest upon all day ! I cannot love you more, daisy, and I would not willingly love you less.

‘ I hear a bee humming—scores hum through the day and no one observes them—but, bee, your soft song is full of memories ! You used to be held up to me as a pattern of what my life was to be. Your toil never frightened me ; I longed to make honey too, but the time was never come. I flitted from flower to flower, but they had no sweetness for me—and now life is passing on, and the honey is yet unmade. Your soft song says, “ Try again—the time is come—now is honey-harvest, gather while you may, or be a drone for evermore.”

‘ And here is an acorn—myriads drop at the feet of the ragged child who follows the cattle. Time was when a pinafore full of acorns was counted enough of amusement for many a day. The tiny cup was a goblet, and a drop

of clear water was as delicious as nectar. Only an acorn ! but what tales it tells of happy rambles through pathless woods, over a rustling wealth of leafy droppings, where treasures appeared at every turn, and the marvels that might come, but came not, enhanced the delight over those that came. We used to think in that sweet foolish time that we were treading wilds untrodden by human foot since "first in woods the noble savage ran," and half believed that Aladdin's lamp, or the purse of Fortunatus, might have been dropped in these wildernesses, and have remained hidden for centuries, for a small pair of blue eyes to spy them out at last.

'A fir-needle next ! a brown, unlovely thing, half hidden in the grass. Can memories cling to anything so trifling ? Fir-needle, you belong to autumnal hours, when large glossy fir-cones, brown gaping fir-cones, sharp prickly fir-cones, and green baby fir-cones, enticed my truant steps far from home. Further, and still further—the next, and the next, and the next—each more tempting than the last—and that great undiscovered one, that lurked just out of sight, and yet was surely but just out of sight ! Who would turn back on the very eve of discovery ? Over the hollow-sounding forest ground, over the slippery fir-needles, more delicious to the tread than was ever a ball-room floor ; past gnarled and twisted forms like Sintram's grim horrors—on, on, without a thought of danger, until some unexpected sound would bring, like a flash of lightning, a vivid sense of peril and loneliness—and then and not till then ——'

'My dearest Gabrielle ! pardon the interruption ; is it possible you are alone ? we felt sure we heard you talking ; you certainly were ; surely you must be a little, a very little, just the least bit in the world ——' and Emma, leaving her sentence unfinished, tapped her forehead significantly with one finger.

Gabrielle turned her head, and found her cousin with the three expected guests a few steps behind her.

'Don't understate the case through delicacy, dear Emma ; you know well that for some time past you have

thought me wholly and entirely mad. Will you come and be mad too? You have no idea how pleasant it is.'

'I have the most vivid conception,' said Harold Bushby, flinging himself at her feet as he spoke. 'O Miss Hope,' he continued, as he gazed into her face, 'you little know how I am consumed by poetry and romance! I am a victim to sensibility. So much so, that I can only say with Horace Walpole,

I sits with my feet in a brook,
And if any one asks me for why—
I gives him a hit with my crook,
And—" 'tis sentiment kills me,"—says I.'

'How skilfully you have concealed this weakness!' said Gabrielle, laughing. 'I really should never have guessed it.'

'Ah! self-repression has been my motto through life. You cannot help knowing by this time that I am a man of a "numble mind"—morbidly distrustful of my own powers. Yet so inherent is poetry within me, that at this very moment I find myself making an impromptu quotation to your eyes.

A violet, by a mossy stone
Half hidden'

'I am not stone-blind, Mr. Bushby.'
'Don't interrupt me—the best was to come,

Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky.'

'But I have two, thank heaven, Mr. Bushby. You are not happy in your quotations to-day.'

'O! how material you are! Vex not thou the poet's mind; what matter whether one star or fifty, so that your eyes are equally bright?'

'No matter, so long as you only deprive me of an eye. I would rather be Cyclops than Argus—Venus than the milky way.'

'I am certain your eyes are full of the milk of human kindness.'

'Then please let them remain so. If you make the atmosphere too warm, even milk may turn sour. Pray when did you arrive?'

'Arrive! I have only just stepped into existence—a minute ago—rather less.'

'I fear I shall be obliged to request you to step out of it again, if you cannot be more rational,' said Gabrielle, as she rose to welcome the other gentleman. 'So, Emma, your friendly intention was frustrated.'

'We had started,' said Emma, 'but half-way on the road we met the party—guns and fishing-rods, carpet-bags and portmanteaux—stowed away in a vehicle that looked like a baker's cart.'

'It was a baker's cart,' said Mr. Rolfe. 'We were told it would take an hour to fetch a fly from Kettlebury, so the baker being in sight, we pressed him into the service, and for a consideration he agreed to convey us and our goods to Kettlebury St. Anne's.'

'But we discovered, to our dismay,' added Harold, 'that he had no intention of allowing his passengers to interfere with the routine of bread dropping. We were forced to submit, and Rolfe actually held the reins while two quarterns, a cottage, and a batch, were left at a neat white house with a brass knocker. However, we tried the effect of an additional half-crown, and he agreed to deliver his passengers first and his loaves afterwards. And, upon my word, bakers have a very decent time of it. How that horse stepped over the ground!'

'Mrs. Pierrepont charged me with innumerable messages to you, Miss Hope,' said Philip Arkwright. 'I am afraid I cannot remember half of them, but they were all to the effect that she hoped you had had a surfeit of rural retirement, and were thinking of re-joining the world.'

'My friends contrive to make me feel very much as if I had forsaken the world for the purpose of causing a sensation,' said Gabrielle, 'instead of having simply come into the country because country life is pleasant to me.'

'Some people can retire from the world without

their absence being observed,' said Harold Bushby, 'but you are not one of those happy persons.'

'I think if it were not for the activity of some noted town-criers,' said Gabrielle, quietly, 'I might have left it as peaceably as other people.'

'Ah! they are abominable inventions those town-criers,' said Harold, complacently. 'Our friend Philip there, is one. You may hear the echo of his tinkle, tinkle in every drawing-room about town. As for Rolfe, I daresay he rings his muffled peal somewhere or other, though it doesn't happen to be in my beat. I have brought you down a trunkful of new books and periodicals. I am sure you must be in want of something to amuse you. If the question is not an impertinent one, what do you do with yourselves all day long?'

'What do we do with ourselves?' repeated Gabrielle, thoughtfully, 'really the idea is new to me. I cannot answer it at once. I think we sometimes work a little.'

'How original! I suppose it must be some peculiar style of work, since you found it necessary to travel nearly two hundred miles to acquire it.'

'I think it is new. I never saw it done in town. We make samplers, and join patchwork, and mend our gloves. Sometimes I think we read a little, and walk a little, and think a little!'

'But on wet days?—'

'Oh! on wet days we play at cat's cradle, or proverbs, or puss in the corner; any game not actually scientific.'

'How much Colonel Mostyn must enjoy them!'

'Every one enjoys everything at Heatherbrae. Low spirits and ennui, and other accompaniments of fashionable life, have not yet penetrated here, and no one is allowed to be out of humour except the hostess.'

'Then I am sure Rolfe had better go back. He has been as churlish and grumpy as a bear ever since we left town. We plied him with sandwiches and bottled ale, but without effect.'

'Perhaps the air of Kettlebury may be more potent.'

'I have not yet pleaded guilty to the accusation,' said Mr. Rolfe. 'Bushby thinks all waters that do not babble must be sullen and stagnant.'

'We shall induce you to babble, never fear,' said Emma, somewhat impatient at a conversation in which she had borne no part. 'It will take you at least four-and-twenty hours to tell me all that has happened since I left town. I am pining for news, and word-of-mouth gossip is better than all the paper news in the world.'

'Philip will accommodate you in this respect better than I can. He takes up news like a sponge takes up water, and parts with it as readily. I am afraid I could tell you nothing that would interest you. You would not care to hear the state of the funds, or the prospects of Europe.'

'I like a variety of news, and at Heatherbrae even the state of the funds has a familiar ring in my ears that is very acceptable. I believe Kettlebury people talk of nothing but the state of the weather, or the state of the crops.'

'Well, they are all portions of the same great economy, and the state of the crops has certainly a more interesting side than that of the funds can boast.'

'Do you really say so? Then I suppose you see something poetic and picturesque in that clumsy rough-looking labourer, with his crazy basket and tools over his shoulder, dragging his hob-nailed boots after him as he lumbers along!'

'Certainly I do. He has held his place in many more of our exquisite English poems than dashing young guardsmen could boast of having done.'

'I daresay he is all very well polished up and glossed over in a poem, but he is most unattractive to the naked eye.'

'I suppose a true poet has no naked eye.'

Emma changed the conversation, being somewhat discomfited, and presently a turn in the road brought them within sight of Heatherbrae, and gave a new direction to their thoughts.

The three who had joined the party were as little alike in outward appearance, as in character and disposition. Mr. Bushby was of middle height, well made and active, with a countenance more than usually handsome and agreeable. His complexion was fair but not florid, his features straight and well-defined, with light hair and moustache, and eyes of bright brown, full of mirth and intelligence. Philip Arkwright was somewhat shorter, and more youthful-looking, of darker complexion, and with more of self-consciousness than his friend. His countenance was also pleasant, though cast in a less intellectual mould. He was much petted by ladies, and was essentially (in masculine phraseology) 'a ladies' man.' He would 'come and go, and fetch and carry,' as the saying is, and be rewarded for his pains by sweeter glances, and a greater degree of familiarity, than would have been accorded to one of more masculine mould. Mr. Rolfe, though the tallest of the trio, was the least good-looking, but there was more of dignity and self-control in his demeanour than in that of either of his companions. His voice was subdued and mellow, in curious contrast to the crisp ring of Harold Bushby's tenor voice, or Philip Arkwright's melodious treble.

CHAPTER X.

A woman, good without pretence,
Blest with plain reason, and with sober sense,
No conquests she but o'er herself desired,
No arts essayed, but not to be admired.
Passion and pride were to her soul unknown.
Convinced that virtue only is our own,
So unaffected, so composed a mind——. *Pope.*

THE spell of uninterrupted sunshine which Gabrielle had hitherto enjoyed at Heatherbrae, was apparently broken by the arrival of her friends. Two or three days of

incessant rain prevented all out-door recreations, and severely tested the mental resources of hostess and guests.

When the fourth day dawned, as wet as either of its predecessors, one or two of the party felt in utter despair. Colonel Mostyn paced the room almost unceasingly, with his hands behind his back, and never spoke except to rail at the weather, sneer at the English climate, or rather uncourteously wish himself at his club. Emma was as disconsolate as her father, roaming about from room to room, from piano to sofa, and from reading to needlework, the whole morning, only brightening up at luncheon-time, when Mr. Bushby appeared, sometimes, but not invariably, accompanied by his friends. Miss Tudor and Gabrielle were not distressed by the weather. The former found no tedium in needlework; she was engaged in working a beautiful group of flowers for Gabrielle; and the latter appeared always fully occupied with her books, her plans, and her domestic arrangements.

Unpromising as was the day, all three gentlemen appeared at luncheon-time, and when this was over, the party settled down in the drawing-room in a resigned frame of mind, to while away the afternoon as best they might. Harold Bushby took up his usual station at the back of Miss Hope's sofa. Mr. Rolfe was absorbed in a 'Blackwood' at one of the side windows; and Emma, piqued at this open want of devotion in the sober knight she had appropriated to herself, gave herself up to an unlimited flirtation with Philip Arkwright.

'How do you think we spent last evening?' asked Harold.

'I cannot imagine,' said Gabrielle.

'As soon as dinner was over, our landlady brought us a note from our neighbour, Mr. Wheeler, requesting us to take tea with him, and apologising for not inviting us to dinner, his domestic arrangements being such as would not admit of his giving a dinner-party.'

'And you went?—I am very glad you did.'

'We accepted his invitation with the greatest pleasure, but being none of us particularly partial to the "cup that cheers but not inebriates," we dispatched a messenger into Kettlebury for sugar, lemons, nutmegs, and other condiments, and proceeded to make an extensive brew of "nightcaps."'

'That was an uncourteous return for his civility.'

'Not at all; we drank his tea first—as little of it as was consistent with good manners—and I believe Rolfe took a second cup out of pure regard for his feelings; and two hours later, when we had all waxed jovial with conversation, we modestly suggested the vicinity of the nightcaps.'

'I am certain his primitiveness was scandalised.'

'Quite the reverse, he was heartily amused. We sat round the fire—for like all bachelors he is conjugally devoted to his fire—and he sipped the fragrant tippie with as much zest as the worst of us. The combination seemed to warm his heart, and awaken old memories, and he began to tell us old Oxford stories and jokes, and sent us away near midnight quite delighted with his simplicity and racy humour.'

'I like Mr. Wheeler very much,' said Gabrielle.

'We will ask him to dine here one day, and invite Dr. Blyth to meet him.'

'And we will brew some more nightcaps. Are these the only neighbours you have?'

'Several families called last week, but I do not suppose we shall be very intimate with them, at least not so intimate as I hope to be with Mr. Wheeler. The great people of the county are all absent, Adam tells me; and at present I much prefer making the acquaintance of the little people. They are more original and more entertaining.'

'I thought them exceedingly vulgar and absurd,' said Emma. 'I am sure Holford and Lake are much more finished ladies in manners and conversation.'

'How can you say so?' said Gabrielle, indignantly. 'You have no discernment, Emma. A silk dress and a toss of the head atone with you for utter want of refine-

ment. The elderly maiden lady, who called last week, was quite a lady, though she had little conversation, and none of the ease of manner produced by much moving in society.'

'That is just what Holford and Lake have got.'

'You see no difference between ease and assurance. Do you know, Cecilia, that these few days of wet weather have proved too much for Holford's forbearance. She asked me this morning how soon I could make it convenient to part with her, and I said "To-morrow."'

'Surely she will not leave you to-morrow?'

'No, that appeared to be too soon to fall in with her own arrangements. She said if I could suit myself in a week or a fortnight, or even a month, she should be quite content, and I said I would try to do so immediately.'

'Is Molly still the *bête noir*?'

'Holford says so, but I think the real grievance is the absence of a butler and footmen. However, she complains sorely of Molly. It appears that Molly lives in an atmosphere of superstition. Everything that occurs in the house is an omen. If a robin perches on the window-sill, he is the harbinger of death. The candles run down in winding-sheets, and mysterious steps pass up and down the staircases when no one is to be seen. Then Molly sees visions and dreams dreams, and by way of raising Holford's spirits, she dreamt, the other night, that she entered a room where two figures lay in their shrouds, and on lifting the cloth that covered them, she recognised the white countenances of Holford and Lake.'

'Barbarous woman!' exclaimed Harold, in great amusement.

'O! she is a dreadful woman!' chimed in Emma. 'Lake always tells me all the horrible things Molly sees and hears, until I have grown so timid that I burn a candle the whole night long, and dare not stay in a room by myself. I live in constant dread that she will dream something about me, and I am sure it will nearly kill me if she does.'

'Adam tells me most of the country women, and not

a few of the men, believe similarly in dreams and omens,' said Gabrielle. 'A bat in the house, or the unexpected appearance of a white rabbit, are thought sure signs of death. Then they have all sorts of minor superstitions. A pricking in the palm of the right hand, shows you are going to receive money; and in the left, that you are about to pay it. A pricking in the knees hints that you will soon kneel in a strange Church. If bees swarm in your chimney, or about your house, it is a sign of a great good luck; but if they settle low—on a gooseberry-bush—or, worse again, on the ground—it is a foreboding of approaching death to some of the household.'

'What a frightful set of people to live amongst!' said Philip, with something of a shudder.

'I like it,' said Gabrielle, 'and I like the tone of mind it reveals. Surely, it is to be preferred to the acuteness of the town-mind, that scarcely recognises the existence of an unseen world.'

'I have no doubt it is very excellent,' said Harold, 'and at any rate it makes a cheerful variety in wet weather. What do you say to having Molly in, and drawing her out on the subject of her dreams and visions?'

'No, no, I won't have Molly laughed at,' said Gabrielle. 'It is no joking matter with her, and I do not wish her to think we regard it as such, though I hope in time to make her understand the difference between faith and superstition.'

'Do you know,' said Emma, who had been straining her ears in silence for some seconds, 'if it were not so desperately wet, I should say that I heard the sound of wheels on the gravel.'

'Say it, by all means, Miss Mostyn, even though it should not prove true,' cried Harold, springing to the window. 'The very suggestion of such a possibility is cheering.'

The sound now became audible to all ears, and presently Mr. Bushby's exclamation of astonishment and gratification brought, to the same point of survey, all

the other occupants of the room. If variety had been craved a few minutes previously, it had certainly responded to the call. The style of equipage now advancing was quite new to the gazers from Heatherbrae, and, indeed, to most other eyes, as it was the original contrivance of a lady whose chief peculiarity was a consideration for her own convenience, and a full indulgence of her own fancy, with a sublime disregard for the praise or blame of friend and neighbour.

The vehicle approaching was a kind of double Bath-chair, exceedingly old, narrow, and shabby, and not a little rickety, in which the occupants sat face to face. It was drawn by a donkey tandem—the poor animals labouring sorely at their task, for the ascent was steep, and the freight heavy. In the principal seat of the little carriage, filling—and how much more than filling?—its moderate dimensions, sat a lady, of whom we will say no more than that she was exceedingly stout. The disparity between the proportions of the carriage and the proportions of the occupant, furnished the ludicrous aspect of the scene, and the toiling efforts of the unhappy pair she drove made it eminently ridiculous.

In the front seat sat a much younger lady, who appeared to be wholly unconscious that the equipage was either unusual or ludicrous. She was holding an enormous cotton umbrella over the carriage, that the lady in the back seat might have her hands free for the manipulation of the reins. The cavalcade was presently completed by the sudden addition of a tall lank lad on another donkey, who, guiltless of stirrups or straps, having stayed behind to open the gate, now cantered briskly ahead of his mistress, in the capacity of outrider.

The merriment of the gentlemen at the window, who were all in a humour to relish a joke, now became unbounded, and Gabrielle, while smiling herself, was obliged to request them to withdraw from sight, lest their mirth should appear offensive to the visitors. A debate was going on in her own mind. She was half persuaded that some one was playing her a practical joke, and that having heard of her contempt for con-

ventional etiquette, they had resolved to call upon her in this fashion to test her sincerity and satirise her foible. She felt in doubt whether to receive the new arrival in all good faith, or treat the equipage as a joke; but her ignorance of country custom made her uncertain whether it might not be an ordinary thing for stout ladies to drive about in a Bath-chair, with a donkey tandem and outrider.

Before she had been able to decide upon a line of action, the visitors were heard entering the hall, and before her companions had had time to compose their countenances into orthodox sobriety, the door was opened and 'Mrs. and Miss Melville' announced.

The lady who first entered was of a type not to be met with every day. As before said, she was exceedingly stout, and she walked as only exceedingly stout ladies do walk. Her face, no less stout than the rest of her person, was peculiarly amiable in expression, with small and very sleepy blue eyes, and hair of sandy hue sprinkled with grey. Her dress was in no way peculiar as to fashion or form, but it was peculiar, and characteristic of the wearer, in the crushed appearance it presented, and the *négligence* with which it was put on. The mauve-coloured bonnet was awry, and half off the head; the lace border within appeared to have been rescued from a rubbish-basket, after a week's sojourn in that locality; the strings, creased and rope-like, had been tied without reference to any consideration but that of keeping the bonnet on the head. Yet, in spite of all this—and herein lay the secret of Mrs. Melville's strength—she was undeniably and unmistakably a lady. The utter absence of self-consciousness with which she looked, moved, and spoke, demonstrated the fact. Had she driven up in a carriage and four, with strawberry-leaves on the shield, and powdered footmen to hold open the door, she could not have been more perfectly composed and at her ease than now, heralded by a raw youth, with three inches of leg visible between trouser and shoe. The last Parisian capote of Madam Elise would have added nothing to the self-possession with which

Mrs. Melville sat and conversed with Miss Hope and her friends, serenely unconscious of, or indifferent to, any defects in her toilet.

Miss Melville shared largely her mother's characteristics. She was a pretty girl, with soft, intelligent, brown eyes, full of humour, an engaging and natural lisp, and a dimple in her chin. Her toilet was the reverse of *soigneuse*, yet the consciousness that such was the case affected her as little as it did her mother.

When Mrs. Melville spoke, it was in a deliberate, sleepy manner, in keeping with the expression of her countenance. Her voice, mellow in tone, was pleasant to listen to, and she expressed herself with good taste and unusual fluency.

Gabrielle, though perplexed at her visitors, soon forgot that she had ever entertained the idea of treating the visit as a practical joke; and was only concerned lest the superficial gravity of the gentlemen should give way at any unexpected turn in the conversation, or at some hapless allusion to the appearance presented by the cavalcade.

She need not have distressed herself; not that Mr. Bushby's self-command and propriety were to be relied upon, but because an explosion of genuine laughter would have disconcerted neither Mrs. nor Miss Melville, nor would any amount of mirth or ridicule have put them out of conceit with a mode of travelling suited to their taste and convenience. They would have joined in the laugh at their own expense, and have told endless anecdotes of the amusing scenes to which their steeds and conveyance had given birth. All this, however, Gabrielle had yet to learn.

'We were very glad indeed when we found we had a neighbour at Heatherbrae,' observed Mrs. Melville. 'News does not travel rapidly in this part of the world, and we only heard of your arrival last week. The weather since then has been so bad that we postponed coming from day to day, but this morning I said to Louisa, "Rain or shine, we must reach Heatherbrae to-day."'

'We are not in the habit of staying at home for the

weather,' lisped Miss Melville, whose bright brown eyes were travelling all round the room, and scanning the countenances of its occupants.

'No, nor of grumbling at it,' said Mrs. Melville, in her dreamy tones. 'The old proverb says, "It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good," and this is even more true of the rain than of the wind. Just now, for instance, it is of the greatest possible benefit to the after-grass. I speak, you may perceive, as a farmer. I have a great many acres in my own cultivation, and superintend the management of them myself; and the consideration of my land and my crops reconciles me to a great deal in the weather that other people find fault with. For the turnips just now the rain is invaluable. I assure you I have suffered great anxiety of mind on the score of my turnips, and after all what is a spoilt bonnet-ribbon compared with a failure in the turnip crop?'

This was said with a twinkle of the eye, and a dry humorous intonation of voice that made it irresistibly comic. Gabrielle felt instinctively that it would overpower Harold's self-control, and she therefore shot at him a warning glance, upon which he adroitly covered the rising laugh with a succession of such rapid and convulsive sneezes as tested the composure of the rest of the party far more than Mrs. Melville's speech had done.

'I am afraid you have a cold, Mr. Bushby,' said Gabrielle, severely.

'I can recommend you some excellent mixtures for colds and coughs,' said Mrs. Melville. 'There is one composed of acetate of ammonia, ipecacuanha and antimonial wine, and muriate of morphine, that I find to be quite a panacea for coughs and colds. My chemist has a permanent order to supply me with a large bottle full, fresh made, on the first of every month, except of course when the first falls on a Sunday.'

'Yes,' chimed in Miss Melville, 'mamma has quite a reputation for curing colds and coughs, and I am bound to bear witness that she has completely cured me of indulging in such weaknesses, for the remedies are so

very complete and severe, that I am careful not to run the risk of requiring them.'

'Do you live at a great distance from Heatherbrae?' enquired Gabrielle.

'About four miles off,' replied Miss Melville, 'but the road is so bad that it might as well be eight. We call our house the "Plover's Nest"—you will never guess why—because I declare that it is built in a cart-rut, and I am sure you will say so too when you come to see us. I hope your springs will be strong, and your nerves equally strong, or I fear we shall never see you at "Plover's Nest."'

'We all have good nerves, I believe,' said Gabrielle; 'at least, I hope I may answer for you, Emma. As for you, Cecilia, I do not anticipate any journey more trying than the first you took behind Tim, when you behaved in such an exemplary manner, not once snatching the reins out of my inexperienced hands.'

'I am very well satisfied with a conveyance like the one in which we drove here to-day,' said Mrs. Melville, complacently. 'The middle of the road is always the best part, and in our donkey-chair we manage to keep out of the ruts. I find the donkeys very useful on my farm, and I have none of the expense of horses and a coachman. My establishment is a very youthful one. I daresay you saw my butler, who accompanied us to ascertain that the road was clear, and to open the gates. He is called Araunah, and is sixteen, and a particularly good youth. My gardener is fourteen, and my groom eleven; and they are all good lads.'

The deliberation and quiet humour with which this account of the establishment at Plover's Nest was delivered—the perfect composure and good faith displayed in Mrs. Melville's manner—were indescribable. They were too much for Harold's sense of propriety. He laughed aloud, and Mrs. and Miss Melville laughed with him, as though the end and object of the visit had been attained, and merriment was considered highly complimentary.

'My neighbour, Mrs. Fraser,' observed Mrs. Melville,

turning to Miss Hope, 'asked me one day why I did not leave my equipage at the gate instead of driving up to the front door, but I told her I thought that was a mistake. I remember how a friend of mine, residing in — shire, wishing to return the call of a titled gentleman in the neighbourhood, hired a donkey-cart, which was to take herself and her husband as far as the lodge-gate, and remain there while they walked up to the house and paid their visit. The plan would have succeeded admirably, had it not begun to rain heavily during their visit, and appeared likely to continue to do so throughout the day. The baronet expressed his hope that they had not arrived on foot, when they incautiously admitted that a conveyance was waiting for them at the lodge-gate. On hearing this the courteous old gentleman would not hear of their walking so far in the rain, and, despite their protestations, dispatched a bepowdered gentleman, in dove-colour and crimson plush, to summon Mr. Wetherall's carriage. My friends had to stand amongst a gay company at the drawing-room windows, to see their two-wheel donkey-cart drawn up before the magnificent colonnade, when, having been conducted to the door by the baronet, who was far too kindhearted and courteous to appear to observe anything unusual in the equipage, they were assisted into it by three or four of the gentlemen in dove and crimson, and managed by dint of a small boy belabouring the bony back of his ass, to crawl off in a zigzag direction, amid the bows and smiles of the merry company at the window.'

This opportune anecdote afforded the merry company in Miss Hope's drawing-room a legitimate outlet for the laughter they had been painfully repressing, and the mirth that ensued was perhaps somewhat disproportionate to the laughableness of the tale. When it had subsided, all felt unmistakably relieved, and the conversation became livelier and more general.

'I am sure your friend was very much to be pitied,' said Emma. 'I can hardly imagine being placed in a more mortifying situation.'

'I don't think my own share in the matter would have occasioned me much chagrin,' said Mrs. Melville, in all sincerity. 'A donkey-cart is a useful conveyance, and it is not to be supposed that all the friends of a baronet have equipages like his own. I should, however, have felt very much for the discomfiture of the kindhearted host himself, who must have felt secretly pained at having been the means of placing his guests in the dilemma. The most awkward part of the business seemed to be their having left the vehicle at the lodge, for, as soon as it appeared, this was in itself a confession that they had been ashamed of it. My friend said she could have borne the smiles of the drawing-room company, if it had not been for the smirks of the gentlemen in crimson and dove.'

'Had I been the unfortunate hero of the story,' said Harold Bushby, 'I should have protested that it was a case of Cinderella's pumpkin and mice, and that the chariot and pair I left at the lodge had dwindled into a donkey-cart.'

'It is quite a mistake to be ashamed of anything that is in itself unobjectionable,' said Mrs. Melville, sleepily. 'A splendid equipage draws up at your door, and ladies in feathers and lace step out, and you are quite disappointed to find that they are no more brilliant or intellectual than your everyday acquaintances. If, on the other hand, a donkey-cart stops the way, what a sensation of agreeable surprise you experience when you find it has brought you a relay of chatty, well-informed visitors.'

Gabrielle smiled at this ingenious defence of the humbler vehicle, and a conversation ensued upon Heatherbrae and the neighbourhood, Mrs. Melville discussing it with a view to pasturage and tillage, her younger companions content to regard it under its picturesque aspect.

A cordial invitation to dinner was declined on account of the weather, but Mrs. Melville protested she could not leave until Miss Hope had fixed upon a day for bringing the whole party to Plover's Nest.

'The wind is veering steadily round towards the west,' she observed, oracularly, 'and we shall see the weather change for the better in less than four-and-twenty hours. May I expect you the day after to-morrow?'

'I think next week would suit me better,' observed Gabrielle. 'Next Tuesday, if agreeable to you, we will pay you a visit.'

Having enveloped themselves in waterproof cloaks, and the carriage having been brought round by the bowing and smiling Araunah, Mrs. Melville was assisted into it by Mr. Rolfe, whose sobriety and good manners were imperturbable. The steeds, though somewhat slow at starting, mended their pace before they were out of sight, and trotted cheerfully after the outrider, who, unable to protect himself with an umbrella, presented a damp appearance, fully shared by the animal he bestrode.

'What do you think of your visitors?' asked Emma, when the brass top of the cotton umbrella had finally disappeared behind a Portugal laurel.

'I was very agreeably surprised. They were intelligent and amusing, and I call Miss Melville a pretty girl.'

'Pretty! About as pretty as her mamma!' exclaimed Emma. 'I hope and twust they will weach Plover's Nest in safety, and dwy their feathers before they go to woost!'

'The lisp without the dimpled chin is nothing, Miss Mostyn,' said Harold. 'Rolfe was bewitched at once by it, and even Philip and myself are a little affected, though we are too magnanimous to stand in his light. I have made an impromptu verse which I am going to ask Miss Hope to inscribe in her album:—

Our hearts are not here
But beneath a brown wimple,
Bewitched, it is clear,
By an exquisite dimple.'

'O! how vewwy pwetty!' exclaimed Emma, half piqued, half amused. 'It sounded like a whyme—I do believe it is poetwy—you must wite it into my album diwectly.'

'Miss Hope,' said Harold, 'how shall we thank you sufficiently for accepting the invitation to Plover's Nest? I long to see the superannuated establishment in full force, and dreaded lest you might let slip the golden opportunity.'

'I fear I shall not be able to include you in the invitation,' said Gabrielle. 'To judge from that violent fit of sneezing, by which you nearly dislocated your neck, you appear to have a most distressing cold; so I shall ask Miss Tudor to stay at home and nurse you, and superintend the making of the water-gruel and treacle-posset upon which you must be kept for the coming week.'

'I am sure, I thought, under the circumstances, I conducted myself very well,' pleaded Harold.

'I shall make your going depend upon the way you behave to-morrow night. I am going to ask you to take a note to Mr. Wheeler from me, to request him to dine with us to-morrow, and I shall send a similar note to Dr. Blyth through the post.'

'I am sure I shall behave well,' said Harold, who was demurely twirling his thumbs. 'Dr. Blyth will not arrive in a Bath-chair and tandem, and Mr. Wheeler has no dimple in his chin, so I can venture to give a guarantee for my good behaviour.'

'I never knew before that a dimple was considered an attraction,' said Emma; 'I don't imagine it would be thought so in town.'

'Ah! but you see we are not in town,' said Harold, delighted to tease her, 'and in the country, especially in wet weather, hearts are very susceptible. I have no doubt Philip will be raving about "Louisa" in his dreams to-night; and as to poor Rolfe, I hear him pacing the room, melancholy-mad, by the hour together, even now, and I expect to-morrow morning we shall find him suspended by the window-cord.'

Emma looked up quickly, and the colour rose on her cheek. 'What are you saying about me, Bushby?' asked Mr. Rolfe from behind his 'Quarterly.'

'Nothing worth the trouble of contradicting,' was

the reply. 'The partitions at the Farm are so slight, and you snore so persistently, that I don't know what it is to get a night's rest.'

Probably Mr. Rolfe did not think the assertion worth contradicting, as he remained absorbed in his Review.

CHAPTER XL

While hope the mind, as strength the frame, forsakes :—
For when so full the cup of sorrow grows,
Add but a drop, it instantly o'erflows.—*Crabbe*.

Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.—*Macbeth*.

AILEEN found her slender hoard sufficient, with care and economy, to meet all existing claims, and to pay for the expense of her journey to Kettlebury. But when this was accomplished, and she gazed at the few coins still left in her purse, the perils of her desolate condition for the first time revealed themselves to her.

It was something to feel herself in the neighbourhood of her sister, and, reminding herself that this had for years been the goal of all her hopes, she gathered up her failing energies, and, repressing the sensation of heart-sickness that had been gaining on her hour by hour, set out in search of an apartment where she might take up her abode until her plans for the future were matured.

She procured a respectable, but very humble, lodging, and lost not an hour in making such enquiries as might enable her to arrange some course of action. The information she obtained was not reassuring. In her ignorance of country towns, she had imagined that there could be no difficulty in procuring a situation as governess in a remote region, where she innocently fancied

the demand must be considerable and the supply limited. She now discovered that the number of families in and around Kettlebury, who were in a position to employ a resident governess, was not great. Of these, some few were absent, some were suited, and she could only hear of one household where a governess was supposed to be needed. She caught eagerly at the frail straw, and endeavoured to reassure her terrified mind by telling herself that this must certainly prove to be the very opening she desired—that the fact of one situation being vacant seemed in itself to point to her as the person intended by Providence to fill it. Poor little Aileen! she knew not that in this very household, governesses went in and out with the rapidity of the changing seasons, and that though many a forlorn one had gone in rejoicing and full of hope, few but had left with feelings of greater satisfaction than those with which they had entered upon their duties.

After a sleepless night, during which she had turned and tossed with alternate hope and despair, with mingled prayers and tears, she arose, weary and depressed, resolved to know her fate without delay. Scarcely daring to touch food, lest her shrinking funds should fail before she had found the means of maintaining herself, she dressed herself in walking attire, and made enquiries about the neighbourhood and the direction she must follow in order to find Fairwood House, where the Mrs. Ingleby, who was without a governess, resided.

‘Is there not a lady of the name of Hope, living near Kettlebury?’ she enquired, of her good-natured, gossiping landlady.

‘I believe there is a lady of that name come to the big house at Kettlebury St. Anne’s, where Mr. Erskine used to live some years ago. I have seen her drive past in a pony carriage several times, but whether ’tis the old lady or the young lady that is Miss Hope, I don’t know and can’t say.’

‘How far off is Kettlebury St. Anne’s?’

‘Some two miles more or less, and the house is built for all the world like a Church, and they do say there is

a chapel in it. You can see it from the road, and it looks a pleasant enough place; but the people on Kettlebury Common are a rough lot, sure enough, and a rougher lot they were till old Mr. Erskine built the Church and the house, and a school for the children, and went to live there himself.

'I suppose Fairwood is not near Kettlebury St. Anne's.'

'No; quite in the other direction. St. Anne's is all on the moor, and you may see some of the fir-trees that grow on the moor out of your own bedroom-window. Shall you be home to dinner, Miss?'

'I cannot tell; do not prepare any dinner. I shall be quite satisfied with a cup of tea when I come back.'

Fairwood House stood in its own grounds, and Aileen crossed the park with a sinking heart. She had never raised her aspirations beyond the household of a professional man or a clergyman, and although she had understood from her landlady that the last governess at Fairwood had been a young person, yet her opinion of herself was so humble that she trembled at her own presumption. She rang softly at the great bell that hung at the front porch, and struggled to keep under the terrified fluttering at her heart, so as to be able to conduct herself with composure.

As she stood there, her slight girlish figure draped in black, her head somewhat bent, and her sad, careworn face turned to the ground, it was hard to believe that only seventeen summers had passed over that sorrowful brow. It was still harder to contemplate the fact that so fragile a creature had no earthly friend to lean upon, no home to shelter her, and but a few pitiful coins rearing their frail barrier between herself and a workhouse. What marvel that a profound melancholy dwelt in those large, thoughtful eyes? that the silent, beseechful prayer went up unceasingly—'O God! pity me! I have none to trust in but Thee!' or that, with clasped hands, the name next dear to the poor lonely heart would sometimes escape, 'Sister, sister!'

The door opened, and a liveried footman awaited to

know her pleasure. 'Is Mrs. Ingleby at home? Can I speak with her?' There was a moment's pause, the servant being apparently in doubt whether one with so sweet a voice and so pure an articulation should be admitted at once to the drawing-room, or whether the diffidence of the request proved the speaker to be of the class who were to be suffered to remain standing at the door until the will of his mistress had been ascertained. Finally, he adopted a middle course, and opening the door of a room—evidently a room reserved for business interviews—contiguous to the entrance, requested her to take a seat, while he carried her name and message to his mistress.

'My name is Hart—Miss Hart—I heard that Mrs. Ingleby was in want of a governess,' faltered simple-minded Aileen, thinking the object of her call had better be stated at once, and that by so doing, she might pave the way for the dreaded interview.

The man-servant acquiesced, and retired. Aileen heard him open the drawing-room door, and presently close it again, after which his receding footsteps bore away into distant regions. Then a long and dreary spell of waiting ensued. She studied every picture on the walls, the pattern of the paper, the pattern of the carpet, the patterns of the curtains and table-cover—until worn out by weariness, exhaustion, and misery, she began to feel sick and faint. She felt sure she was forgotten, yet she dared not ring the bell, lest by so doing she might offend. She dared not depart, since to do so would be to resign her one hope of avoiding poverty and despair. She had no watch, and could but measure time by the increasing weariness of her sensations.

At length, with every limb aching from sitting so long in one position, and with a great and growing disposition to weep out the fulness of misery that oppressed her heart, she rose and paced the room, hoping and praying that some unforeseen circumstance might reveal to the household the fact of her presence.

Hitherto the house had been remarkably free from sound of any kind, but ere long—she knew not how

long—noises that evidenced life and activity began to be heard, and presently a carriage drove up to the door.

Aileen reseated herself, and waited with breathless suspense. Ten minutes elapsed, and then there was a great bustle in the hall, and a sound of voices.

‘Where is my carriage cloak? Johnny! Laura! one of you brought it in from the carriage yesterday! You naughty children! what have you done with it? Come here this minute and tell me.’

‘I hung it up in the hall, mamma,’ said a voice.

‘No such thing, sir. If you had, it would be hanging there now. You must have put it in the waiting-room, as you did once before.’

The brusque, but not unkind, tones approached the door of the room in which Aileen sat with beating heart. Presently the door was flung open, and a lady of middle age—fashionably dressed, handsome, but bold-looking, dashed in, in search of her cloak.

‘Good gracious! I declare, I had altogether forgotten you! Why on earth didn’t you ring the bell? Laura, tell Simpson he must wait five minutes while I speak to this—this——, and you and Johnny may get into the carriage and settle yourselves.’ Then turning again to Aileen, she observed, ‘I quite forgot what name you sent in.’

‘Hart—Aileen Hart,’ replied Aileen, who had risen, and stood trembling with nervousness and exhaustion before Mrs. Ingleby.

‘Ah! yes—Miss Hart;—you came to offer as a governess, you said. I want a governess, certainly, but you look to me extremely young. Where have you lived last?’

‘I have never lived out as a governess before.’

‘Ah-h-h! That is very much against you. What do you teach? Music, French, drawing, history, geography, ciphering, and so on, I suppose—just what they always teach, or profess to teach.’

Aileen, dismayed at the lady’s abrupt, off-hand manner, contrived to stammer out that she thought she could teach most of these things.

'Of course as you have never lived out before, you don't expect much stipend—wages—salary—what do you call it?—fifteen or twenty pounds a year, perhaps, and a comfortable home.'

Aileen faltered that the home was the great thing, and the salary a comparatively unimportant consideration. Unhappily her modest pretensions did her no good in the eyes of the lady.

'I fear you are too young—too inexperienced—and then, never having lived out before! how am I to know anything about you? Where are you living? Who are your friends?'

To all of which the forlorn girl, with sinking heart, replied that she could give a reference to a clergyman, that she had no friends, and that she was at present lodging in Kettlebury.

'In Kettlebury! Oh! then there can be no possible hurry in the matter. I fear you will not suit, but I will think it over, and if I change my mind, I can let you know. I am really very sorry you have been kept waiting so long. Thomas, fetch a glass of wine for Miss Hart, and be quick.'

And Aileen, albeit half-choking with disappointment and despair, took the wine, thinking, as she swallowed it, that it was probably the last she should taste for many a long day, and then, without betraying the desolation at her heart, retraced her steps in silence.

Through the rest of that day she remained in her tiny bedroom, pondering with a fearful heart over her future prospects. A sleepless night, disturbed with alternations of vague terror and of cold despair, succeeded. With daylight a faint gleam of hope revived. She made enquiries about a registry office in the nearest town of note, and parted with one of her carefully hoarded shillings, in order that her name might be placed upon the books.

This done, she started to walk to Kettlebury St. Anne's. She fancied that the sight of the very chimneys of the house where one lived whose parentage was in some measure identical with her own, would infuse new

spirit into her failing energies. The walk was long and fatiguing—one continual ascent, and Aileen's walking powers had been lately but little tried, and she was exhausted through lack of food and rest. The yearning at her heart, however, bore her onwards, and at length she reached the simple village Church, and gazed across the intervening landscape, at the oriel windows and stacked chimneys of Heatherbrae.

It stood, embosomed in pine-trees—not the rude Scotch pine that clad the fort on her right hand, but choice pines from foreign lands, which had taken kindly to the soil, flourished there luxuriantly, and presented a rich contrast of various shades of green, blending and amalgamating and harmonising with the surrounding scenery as no other foliage would have done. Between the groups of trees and shrubs she could see the verdant lawn, bright and well-kept, and the flower-beds that relieved it at intervals.

She sat down wearily upon a stile that led into a kind of rude Church-path, and pictured to herself the unknown sister, dwelling in that pleasant home, surrounded with friends and comforts, dispensing her bounties, tending her flowers, driving out in her pretty carriage; and then she thought of herself, lonely and friendless, faint with fatigue and exhaustion, poverty and humiliation staring her in the face! No thought of discontent crossed her mind, but only a great longing that her sister could pass by and see her forlorn state, and treat her with kindness and sympathy, as she would probably treat any needy inhabitant of that needy neighbourhood.

But no one came that way. No form which she might fondly imagine to be her sister's strolled into that pleasant garden; the faint smoke that curled upwards from the chimneys was the sole sign of habitation she could discern in the picturesque house; and at length, warned by excessive exhaustion, she rose and returned to the small poverty-stricken apartment which was the nearest approach to 'home' that earth contained for her.

As the day wore on she contemplated nightfall with unspeakable dread. The lonely hours of stillness and darkness, though hallowed by prayer, were made dreadful by anticipations of the fate that might be in store for her. Weakened by long watching, much sorrow, and spare diet, she was unable to lay hold of the 'guiding Hand unseen,' and, even while her lips moved in prayer, her mind was distracted by forebodings.

Another day and another night wore slowly on, and by that time Aileen, by vigil and fast and self-tormenting visions, was reduced to the lethargy of despair. Throughout the morning she sat in a state of calm stupefaction, doing nothing, and gazing vacantly out of her narrow window at the few straggling fir-trees that crowned the highest point of Kettlebury Moor. The woman with whom she lodged came at midday to ask whether she should prepare anything for her dinner, but Aileen gave no reply, except by shaking her head in an absent manner; and the woman, whose child was ill, and her time fully occupied, could not stay to investigate the strangeness of her lodger, though she expressed her belief downstairs that something was wrong with the poor thing.

Still fasting, and well-nigh fainting, Aileen watched the sun sink lower and lower in the heavens, and vaguely speculated upon how many more sunsets she might watch before the eternal Sun rose upon her failing sight. The thought had more than once presented itself of casting herself upon her sister's generosity; but her mother's warnings were fresh in her memory, and now weakness had so paralysed her energies, that, apart from other considerations, she felt unequal to the effort. It was less trouble to sit there in a dull, quiet dream, trusting that 'something would happen,' or that some species of long, long sleep might bring rest to her weary frame. It seemed that, already, exclusion from the world, and the absence of all intercourse with kindred minds, had partially weaned her from the interests of everyday life. The bustle and commotion of the Kettlebury streets affected her only as the sight

of a thoroughfare in a moving panorama might do. It seemed far off—unreal—as though she were regarding it from some dream-world at a distance. The blue sky and the stars felt nearer than the Kettlebury market-place—and when, at length, her door was rudely opened, she was as one who had been in a deep sleep from which she could not readily awaken.

‘Miss Hart—my dear life—here’s the doctor downstairs, and I’ve asked him to come up and speak a word with you, for nothing has passed your lips this blessed day, and you look for all the world like one half gone. Speak up to Dr. Blyth, my dear soul, and let’s see if he can’t do something for you.’

Aileen turned her head, but dimly comprehending what it all meant. Mrs. Cox disappeared through the door, to allow room for a gentleman to enter the small chamber, and then, hearing her sick child cry below, closed the door and departed.

The doctor who stood before Aileen, and was regarding her with a keen, bright eye and acute penetration, was a young man of middle height, slight and actively built, well-featured, with decision written in face and mien. The expression of his countenance softened as he beheld the young, worn face, now sharpened by suffering, and the large, dark eyes, beautiful as ever, that met his with a dreamy, unreal gaze, which seemed to unveil to him a portion of the young girl’s sad history.

‘Are you feeling ill?’ he asked, rather by way of opening the conversation than for the sake of information.

Aileen made no reply, except by shaking her head. Her lips felt glued together, and to speak was such an exertion.

He flung open the window, and called to a youngster in the court below. ‘Jack, my boy, run in next door, and ask them to give you a wine-glassful of brandy for Dr. Blyth.’

The lad darted off, and Aileen dreamily wondered what it might mean. Right or wrong, it was not worth the trouble of an enquiry or a protest. Her wasted hand, limp and cold, was taken by the doctor, and the

pulse felt—if he could be said to feel so faint an indicator of life. Then he seated himself in front of her, and, still retaining the hand, proceeded to rub it between his own, until a single thump upon the door signalled the return of Jack.

A teaspoon was sent for, and Dr. Blyth administered several spoonfuls of the life-giving spirit to his patient, much as he might have fed an infant. In a few minutes Aileen felt a warm glow tingling through her veins, and the feeling of intense prostration was relieved. Some time still elapsed before she was able to answer the doctor's enquiries intelligibly, and even then the sense of dreamy unreality remained in her mind, and imparted vagueness to her replies; but Dr. Blyth saw that the crisis was past, and that with common care and attention the patient would rally and probably recover.

'How long have you been in Kettlebury?'

'Some time—I don't know how long.'

'Have you any friends here?'

'No.'

'What brought you here?'

Aileen hesitated. 'I wanted to be a governess.'

'A governess!—to whom?'

'Any one.'

'Have you no friends anywhere?'

'No—my mother is dead.'

'No brothers or sisters?'

'No friends,' was the reply.

'Have you been trying to meet with a situation as governess?'

'Yes, but I was too young—she would not take me.'

'And you have no money left?'

Aileen instinctively drew her purse from her pocket. Dr. Blyth opened it, and found three-and-twenty shillings and some pence.

'You feared your money would not hold out, and so you starved yourself—was that it?'

Aileen assented dreamily.

'Never fear—you shall not want—I will see to that.'

Now, you must grow strong and brisk again, and then I will get you a situation.'

'There are no governesses wanted.'

'Oh, yes! there are plenty, though not just here, perhaps.'

'I must stay in Kettlebury. I could be a nurse or a housemaid—indeed, indeed, I should not mind.'

'How soon do you think you could carry a baby? and as for these delicate white hands—are they to scrub floors?'

'They could—I must stay in Kettlebury.'

'You have not told me your name yet?'

'Aileen.'

'Aileen! what a pretty name!—and what besides?'

'Aileen Hart.'

'And why must you stay in Kettlebury?'

'I must—I must—but I cannot say why.'

'Well, I will not weary you with more questions.

Let Mrs. Cox come and assist you to go to bed—have a good night's rest, and when I come to-morrow you will be strong enough to talk over some plan for the future. Take some bread and milk, or anything you fancy, before going to bed, and don't on any account starve yourself. That is the worst economy. The sooner you are strong, the sooner you will be able to work. Your purse will hold out for some days, and then you shall fall back upon mine; and, you know, when you are in a good situation you can easily repay me. Now, don't trouble yourself with thanks till you are stronger. Let me feel your pulse once more.'

He took her hand into his. A vivid sense of God's all-merciful Providence in thus raising up a friend for her in her utter extremity, flashed across her, and, forgetful of all else, she caught his hand in hers, and in thankful gratitude pressed it to her lips. The colour flew into the face of the young doctor, but the calm countenance of the girl of seventeen was overspread by no such tint. As he departed, the purity of that maiden kiss affected him strangely. It was unlike anything he had ever heard or thought of. The expression of those

large, sorrowful eyes had been innocence itself, and no sister's lips could have touched that hand with more of purity or less of passion. He was still musing on the subject when he encountered Mrs. Cox at the foot of the narrow staircase.

'Well, sir, and what do you thing of the poor thing?'

'Oh! she will do, Mrs. Cox, never fear! You must take good care of her. She is a lady, and no mistake. You must go up now, and put her to bed, and give her some good bread and milk—new milk and the bread boiled in it, you know; and I will come and see her again to-morrow. How long has she been with you?'

'A week come Thursday, sir. She said she wanted to go out as a governess, and she went to Fairwood and offered, but Mrs. Ingleby thought her too young. Yes, sir, I think with you that she's a lady born, and it did make my heart ache to see her starving herself with that thin white face.'

'Don't let her pay any rent. I will be responsible for that. The great thing is to keep her mind easy. I can't say how it would have been if she had gone on in this way a day or two longer. I believe her mind would have gone if her body had survived the ordeal. Now let me see you upstairs before I go, my good woman, and then I shall know it is all right.'

Aileen went to bed, submissive as a child—ate her bread and milk with an appetite, and then closed her eyes and offered up her thanks and praises to God, who had sent help to her when all help seemed gone. She slept the long, unbroken sleep of utter weariness; and when she woke the day was advanced, and the cloudiness that had overshadowed her mind was gone.

Mrs. Cox presently looked in at the door. 'Oh! you're awake now, Miss Hart; and a fine sleep you've had—all thanks to the doctor, it's my belief. Dr. Blyth passed the door just now, and asked how you were. I told him you were fast asleep, and he said you wasn't to be 'wakened on no account whatever. He'll call again by and by. Is there anything I can do for you? Shall I bring you some breakfast before you get up?'

'Not before I get up, thank you; but I shall be very glad of some bread and milk as soon as I am dressed. I feel better this morning.'

At mid-day Dr. Blyth called again. 'You are looking all the better for a night's rest,' he observed, as he felt her pulse.

'I am feeling much better,' said Aileen, 'and I ought to thank you, for I believe I was very ill when you came to me; but I don't know how to express all the thankfulness I feel.'

'Never mind, I don't want thanks. I want you rather to tell me something about yourself. You were too weary to answer questions last night. What brought you to Kettlebury?'

Aileen hesitated. 'That is almost the only question I wish not to answer,' she replied; and a faint colour tinged her cheek. 'You would not think the worse of me if you knew my reason.'

'Well, let that pass; but now that you are at Kettlebury and wish to remain here, you must find some occupation.'

'I am willing to take any situation that I am capable of filling.'

'But your birth and education raise you above menial occupation.'

'Why should you say so?' And Aileen coloured again.

'I judge so from your speech and your manners, and those white hands. Don't take fright—I am not curious. I have no wish to learn anything you desire to conceal. You applied for the situation of governess at Fairwood, I hear. I conclude you can give references?'

'One reference—to a clergyman.'

'Only one; however, perhaps that might be sufficient. You seem to me to be somewhat in a dilemma. You are bent upon not leaving Kettlebury, and yet there is no opening for a governess either here or in the neighbourhood.'

Then I must be something else.'

'But what?—surely you would not stand behind a counter?'

'Not willingly—no, indeed, not willingly; but there are other situations. Could I not be a nurse in some family where there were no children to carry?'

'Consider the style of person you would have to associate with. Could you bear constant intercourse with vulgar, unrefined minds.'

A look of pain crossed Aileen's brow. 'I do not think I could—but, oh! what else is open to me? I must do something, and I must do it at once, or else—you can guess the rest,' she added in a lower tone.

'What should you say to attending upon a lady—being a kind of superior lady's-maid?'

'I will gladly do anything you can suggest.'

'I know of a lady, a very good and amiable lady, as I understand, who is in search of such an attendant. I was at her house last night, and she asked me if I could recommend any one to her.'

'Did you think of me?'

'I did, and I gave her an account of your circumstances, so far, at least, as I was able. She had not, of course, contemplated engaging any one but a genuine servant, but her kind heart seemed much moved for you; and if you feel inclined to try the experiment, I think she will be the same.'

'I shall be most willing, most thankful. I will do my very best to serve her.'

'And now that I have said thus much to you, I may as well tell you plainly that I have no faith myself of the scheme answering. It may serve for the present, but it can scarcely be a permanent arrangement, as I told Miss Hope last night. The duties of the post will be irksome to you, the position of inferiority will be hardly endurable; but you must do something, and this seems to be the best that has offered. Even should you not remain at Heatherbrae, I believe you will have secured a good friend in Miss Hope, who is very rich, and also very benevolent. You see I have been

somewhat of a schemer in your behalf. What is the matter? Are you faint?’

But Aileen was already unable to answer him; and before he could apply remedies her head had fallen back, and she had become insensible.

It was some time before she recovered consciousness. ‘I am so weak!’ she faintly murmured at last.

‘You are weak! It is quite time something was done for you. Take some more brandy. Now you must keep yourself quiet. You had better lie down, and my housekeeper shall bring you over some soup. Miss Hope said she would call and see you this afternoon; and when she comes you had better give her the reference you alluded to, and tell her as much about yourself as you can. Don’t lose the chance of making such a good friend. Do you still feel faint? Mrs. Cox had better come and remain with you for a time. You are not fit to be alone.’

So saying, he left the room, and Aileen gladly crept towards the bed, there to rest her feeble frame and try to comprehend the great marvel that had befallen her, and to nurse her wasted strength for the longed-for, yet much dreaded interview, which was to take place that very day.

CHAPTER XII.

Oh, there is something sublime in calm endurance, something sublime in the resolute, fixed purpose of suffering without complaining, which makes disappointment oftentimes better than success!
Hyperion.

AILEEN’S reflections, as she lay on her hard bed in the meagrely furnished room, were of a mixed character. The prospect of meeting her sister, the only being on earth with whom she could claim kindred, had always been, apart from other considerations, exquisitely de-

lightful to her imagination ; but now that the longed-for moment was so near at hand, Aileen's heart failed her, and she contemplated the coming interview with more of dread than satisfaction. She was still so weak in mind and body that she feared she should be unable to do justice to herself ; and if her sister should conceive a repugnance to her at their first interview, how materially would her hopes for the future be impaired ! Unwilling to yield to such disheartening apprehensions, she strove to rouse herself, and to dwell on the epithets which Dr. Blyth had applied to her sister. The assurance that she was good, amiable, and benevolent, was full of comfort. It did not certainly prove that Miss Hope would be willing to accept as a sister a friendless, half-starved wanderer, who would thankfully enter upon any engagement, however menial, in order to obtain a maintenance. To ask her to do so at some future date, to disclose the link that bound the heiress to her quondam maid, would require a strength of mind that Aileen now was far from possessing.

Then she relapsed into a dreamy contemplation of her probable life as Miss Hope's personal attendant. Her heart throbbed with pleasure at the thought of smoothing the tresses of her own father's daughter, listening to the voice that might well sound familiar, and studying a character that sprang from the same source as her own. She rejected with scorn the notion that any services performed for Gabrielle Hope could merit the title of menial. What would she not joyfully do for her were she her acknowledged sister ? and could the mere fact that Miss Hope was unconscious of the tie that bound them, alter her own view of the matter ? To be near Gabrielle, to watch her, to wait upon her, to serve her with more fidelity than that of a devoted servant, to love her with tenfold the love of a grateful dependant—this was at present all she asked or desired. For the rest, He who had protected her thus far would safely guide her to the end.

It never occurred to her that the fact of having stood in the relation of servant to Miss Hope might at some

future day prove an insuperable barrier to the recognition of a nearer tie. Many a kind but proud heart might be willing to acknowledge as a sister some friendless and obscure governess, which would yet close itself to the claims of one who had performed menial offices and consorted with domestics. Aileen, in her simple-mindedness, lost sight of all other considerations in the delightful prospect of constant intercourse with her sister; and when somewhat revived by rest and the tempting food supplied by the young doctor's house-keeper, she rose, and endeavoured to prepare herself for the interview on which the prospects of her future life might depend.

Yet, although she had had some hours' warning of the approaching visit, her highly strung nerves gave way as soon as she heard footsteps on the stairs, and the silvery tones of a peculiarly sweet voice outside the door. She dreaded a repetition of the former fainting fit; but happily this did not ensue, though a death-like paleness overspread her wasted face, and caused the mournful dark eyes to stand out with startling prominence, and this effect was further heightened by the robe of unrelieved black which she wore.

The lady who entered was taller than herself, simply but tastefully arrayed, and possessed of graceful ease of speech and movement. Aileen, with drooping eyelids, felt unable to lift her gaze to the being who had been, through life, the idol of her imagination. She could not venture an attempt to rise from her seat. An hysterical sensation caught her breath, her head grew dizzy, and for some moments she felt scarcely sensible of what was passing around her.

Miss Hope seated herself by Aileen's side, with a countenance of the tenderest compassion. She took the wasted hand in hers, and said in the gentlest of tones, 'I was not prepared to find you looking so very ill. You ought to be in bed, with a nurse to attend upon you. I am sure you are not strong enough to sit up.'

'I am better to-day,' faltered Aileen—'it is only the excitement of your coming.'

‘Do not let that excite you. I am come to see what I can do for you. Dr. Blyth seemed to think you were in want of friends.’

Aileen could not trust herself to reply.

‘I will be your friend, if you will let me. It must be very sad to be without friends. Will you try to look upon me as one?’

Aileen covered her face with her handkerchief, and broke into a sudden hysterical burst of weeping. It was so many, many days since she had wept, except that bitterest of all weeping—silent heart-tears—that the relief was inexpressible. When the first violence had abated, she found that the stifling sensation which had long oppressed her had in a measure passed away, and before long she was able to arrest her tears, and try to respond to the touching kindness of her visitor.

‘You are so weak,’ said Miss Hope, pitifully. ‘Do not try to restrain yourself. The tears may do you good. I am in no hurry—my time is quite my own; and when you feel more composed you shall tell me how I can help you. That lady, on the other side of you, is my cousin, Miss Tudor. You need not be afraid of her; she is goodness and kindness itself.’

‘It was your kindness that overcame me,’ said Aileen. ‘I have not known kindness since my mother’s death, and I thought I was so very friendless. But for Dr. Blyth, I think I should have died.’

‘He appears very compassionate. He told me about you, and asked me to come and see you, and try to advise you. Have you seen him to-day?’

‘Yes; he came this morning. I could not thank him as I wished to do.’

‘I don’t think he wants thanks. I hear he is always doing acts of kindness. A medical man has such wonderful opportunities for doing so—almost more than a clergyman.’

‘He told me to give you the address of a clergyman who used to visit us whilst my mother was ill. He is the only person in the world to whom I can refer, and even he does not know very much about me. But you

need not fear that I have ever done anything very wrong, or my mother either. There was no stain upon us.'

'Poor child! I had not thought of such a thing. You don't look like one who has anything to be ashamed of. Dr. Blyth told me you had been trying to meet with a situation as governess, but were unsuccessful. Shall I endeavour to hear of some such situation for you?'

'Then you will not let me be your maid?' and Aileen's voice trembled.

'My maid! I know Dr. Blyth suggested the idea, but when I entertained it I had not seen you. I could not let you so degrade yourself. Your birth and education evidently fit you for some higher post.'

'I do not wish for a higher one. I would rather wait upon you than do anything else. I will do all that your maid has done, and try with all my power to please you.'

'I do not think I should be justified in allowing you to place yourself in such a position. It might be an injury to you hereafter.'

'How can it injure me? I have no friends. If I go out as a governess I shall be shunned and slighted—no one will care for me. I will not set myself up, if you will only try me. I will behave in all things simply as your maid.'

Miss Hope looked across at her cousin with grave, earnest eyes. 'Cecilia, advise me. Do not let me do what is wrong by this orphan girl. Remember, she is so young she can scarcely judge of the step she proposes taking. Will she ever live to regret it, if I accede to her wishes?'

'Never, oh, never!' murmured Aileen.

'It is hard to say,' replied Miss Tudor, thoughtfully. 'I do not think one born and bred as a lady could occupy the position Holford has done. Miss Hart might fulfil the duties of such a post, because they have been light, and not in themselves degrading; but there are other things to be considered.'

'Very true; she could never associate with the servants—that is not to be thought of.'

Aileen's heart died within her.

'But, Cecilia, she need not be called a lady's-maid. She might have her own room, and take her meals alone. I could arrange that with Molly; and if the plan did not answer, I could still try to obtain for her a situation as governess.'

'Yes, if you think the having been your maid would be no impediment.'

'I would not call her "maid"—she might be called "companion,"' said Gabrielle; and there was a pleading tone in her voice that made Aileen long to throw herself at her feet. She could not control the impulse that led her to say—

'You shall never, never repent it. I will serve you with my whole life. You are saving me from misery and despair. Oh, don't be afraid! It is not wrong—it is right you are doing—God knows!'

'Then it is a compact,' said Gabrielle, without further hesitation. 'I will try to be a kind friend to you, and you shall be a faithful friend to me. And when you tire, as we must expect you to do, you have only to say, "I made a mistake," and you shall find me ready and willing to help you to the utmost of my power.'

Aileen shook her head, while her lip quivered. She could not trust herself to say how impossible it was that she should ever tire.

'And now,' said Gabrielle, rising, 'we have only to settle when our engagement shall commence. You ought to be removed from this close room as soon as possible; but then I should not like you to come to Heatherbrae until Holford, my maid, has left.'

'How soon does she leave you?' asked Miss Tudor.

'As soon as I can make it convenient,' said Gabrielle; but then, you know, she will not like being sent away in a hurry. Probably the end of the week may suit her views. Will that seem a very long time?' she asked, turning to Aileen.

'Oh, no! nothing will seem long now that I have

something to look forward to. A month would not appear so long as the last three or four terrible days; 'and she closed her eyes with a shiver at the recollection.

'You do not look so pale now as you did when I entered. I felt quite shocked then. Now, remember, you are my charge from this moment. You need purchase nothing for yourself—I will send you nourishing food from Heatherbrae, and you must grow a great deal stronger by the time I send my servant Adam with the carriage to fetch you.'

Aileen smiled assent.

'Farewell!' and for one instant the sisters' hands lay locked in one another. Did any mysterious thrill of sympathy pass over Gabrielle in that moment? Her eyes were full of a pitiful tenderness, and, as she turned to depart, she look back and sighed over the thought of the young life left friendless and alone in that most desolate room. She paused in the doorway to give a parting word of consolation—'Do not fear that I shall forget you. You shall hear from me to-morrow.'

Aileen was troubled by no such fear. Her heart was too full for words. That very evening a basket was left at the house for Miss Hart, filled with delicacies likely to tempt the appetite of an invalid. Ere she leant her head on her pillow that night, Aileen knelt at her bedside—scarce able to pray—in the deep silence of an overwhelming thankfulness. She never doubted that the unformed, voiceless prayer was audible in the realms to which it ascended.

CHAPTER XIII.

The snug circle round the parlour fire.—*Bishop.*

KETTLEBURY resources, combined with Gabrielle's innate good taste, had conspired to make the drawing-room at Heatherbrae as pleasant an apartment as could be found

in all the country-side. Crimson curtains draped the oriel windows, couches and lounging-chairs, sufficiently luxurious, though not of the last approved Baker Street pattern, were arranged enticingly about the room. The table was always littered with new books and periodicals, ordered through the Kettlebury bookseller, and, in defiance of Emma's remonstrances, the mantelpiece and chiffonnier had been adorned with Dresden shepherds and shepherdesses, telling their tale 'under the hawthorn in the vale.' Sundry vases, of various shape and colour, lustres and scent-bottles that had long lain shrouded in dust at the neighbouring china-shop, had been rescued from obscurity by the benevolent lady of Heatherbrae, and now ornamented her occasional tables. The choice of a piano had not been entrusted to native discrimination; but mirrors and picture-frames, and other articles essential to drawing-rooms, had passed through Kettlebury hands, and reflected no discredit upon those who had supplied them.

Miss Hope found no difficulty in filling her pleasant rooms with company. Amongst other Kettlebury acquaintances, Mr. Wheeler and Dr. Blyth gladly availed themselves of the sociable suggestion that they should drop in upon her occasionally, when the work of the day was over. The visitors at Moor Farm spent every evening at Heatherbrae, as a matter of course; and Gabrielle, though glad to have her mornings uninterrupted, that she might roam freely amid the buds and blossoms of her quaint garden, or the scarcely less fragrant pathways of the moor, and form schemes for the benefit of her rustic neighbours, was always ready for social mirth later in the day, and proved herself a hostess as genial as she was hospitable.

It was the day on which Holford had for ever turned her back on the uncongenial neighbourhood of Kettlebury; but Gabrielle had resolved not to send for Aileen until dusk, partly to avoid the new arrangement becoming town-talk in a small and gossiping society, and partly that Aileen might retire to rest soon after her arrival, and thus be spared unnecessary excitement.

Meanwhile Miss Hope discussed her philanthropical schemes with Mr. Wheeler, in the cheerful drawing-room, where the chilliness of an autumnal evening was forgotten in the radiant glow of a wood fire. She was feverishly impatient to be doing something for the good of the people of St. Anne's, but unwilling to take any active measures towards securing her object without first taking the advice of the incumbent.

'I have now been here some time,' she remarked, 'but as yet I seem to have done nothing but consider my own comfort and convenience. My desire is to help the people to assist themselves. I have numberless theories on the subject, and I want you to tell me whether they are practical. I would not for the world pauperise the people, for their independence has impressed me very much since I have been here. It is so unlike what I used to see at Headworthy.'

'Yes, they are independent—if independence is a virtue—somewhat too independent, perhaps. Not that I mean to find fault with them—poor things! poor things! With their antecedents, their training, and their temptations, we should be ten times worse—ten times worse!'

'But, how can I assist them in such a manner as to raise their general condition without making self-exertion less imperative? One of my schemes is to do it by means of the children—say, by clothing the children at the school. This would materially improve their outward appearance, and possibly increase their self-respect, while it would indirectly benefit the parents, without relieving them of the burthen of maintaining their families.'

'Admirable! You could not have made a more happy suggestion. By these means we shall educate the eye, and who can say that education is not as much the business of the eye as of the mind? The selection of colours will be of great importance. Children love warm and bright colouring, and a child's instinct is invariably correct. An artist introduces scarlet or crimson into his landscape to contrast with and heighten

the effect of the brown, green, and orange-tints of mother-earth and her foliage: a woman in a crimson cloak picks sticks beneath the spreading beech-tree, or a sailor in a scarlet nightcap lolls, pipe in mouth, against the side of his vessel. If our moorland scenery has hitherto had a want, it has been that of vivid colouring, to relieve and diversify the rich and sombre tints of heather and pine. The introduction of scarlet cloaks would turn every scene into a picturesque landscape, and give our simple folk some conception of the brilliant spectacle presented by our troops upon the battle-field, or of the grandeur of civil and ecclesiastical robes of state.'

'But,' said Gabrielle, drawing a long breath, 'I had not made up my mind to give them scarlet cloaks. Don't you think they would impart rather a grotesque appearance to the children, and bring upon them a great deal of laughter and ridicule?'

'But, there again,' said Mr. Wheeler, absorbed in his subject, 'can children be too soon taught to turn a deaf ear to ridicule? Sneers and taunts must assail them through life, and the more virtuous they strive to be, the more derision will fall to their portion. By habituating them to ridicule thus early, and rendering it palatable by means of an attractive gift, we shall be indirectly promoting the education of the mind.'

'Still, there is another point to be considered,' observed Gabrielle, sorely perplexed. 'Scarlet cloaks will cost a great deal more than brown or grey ones; and although I would not consider expense where a real object was to be gained, I do not feel sure that in this case the additional money might not be better expended.'

'Brown or grey,' repeated Mr. Wheeler, who evidently revelled in gorgeous tints, 'brown or grey; and would you really omit scarlet altogether?'

'Oh! surely not altogether, Miss Hope?' exclaimed Harold, who, with Dr. Blyth, had been exceedingly edified by Mr. Wheeler's pertinacity and Miss Hope's perplexity. 'Why not have scarlet legs à la flamingo? You would thus be conveying a practical illustration of natural history.'

'Mr. Bushby, your remarks are always irrelevant,' said Miss Hope, severely. 'I am very much in earnest. I do not wish to start a troupe of little mountebanks, however much amusement you might derive from such a spectacle.'

'A thousand pardons,' said Harold, meekly. 'I assure you I only stepped in as a mediator, hoping to effect a compromise between Mr. Wheeler and yourself. I will only make one more suggestion. What about scarlet umbrellas, à la Malagasy? They might be the medium for imparting notions of royalty, not to say geography, and, in case of provoking ridicule, might easily be turned into defensive weapons. Or, since the adoption of scarlet in any form might prove aggravating to an itinerant bull, the umbrella would have the supplemental advantage of dismaying as well as attracting. Pray let umbrellas be taken into consideration.'

'You turn everything into ridicule,' said Gabrielle, resolved not to smile. 'The question at present is not, shall the colour be scarlet or grey? but, shall the clothing of the school-children form a part of my scheme?'

'Certainly, certainly,' said Mr. Wheeler. 'There cannot be two opinions upon that point. Then I would also suggest the erecting of some model cottages. You cannot improve the condition of the poor unless you improve their habitations. A knot of model cottages in Waife's Dingle yonder would be most picturesque, and essentially stimulative to the progress of health and morality at St. Anne's. The education of the eye should again be the main point to be borne in mind. Gable ends and casement windows, stacked chimneys, and overlapping eaves, add but little to the expense, and cultivate in the peasantry a taste for correct architecture. I have seen a great many very excellent plans for model cottages, and I have no doubt we could, any of us, draw a rough outline in a very short space of time.' Whereupon, Mr. Wheeler, who had again mounted his hobby, produced a pencil, and proceeded to sketch his ideal conception on the back of a letter.

Gabrielle, meanwhile, sat gazing at the fire, lost in thought. She had sorely felt the need of an adviser, but she began to doubt whether she had found the adviser she sought. Model cottages and scarlet cloaks were not the channels in which her philanthropy had proposed to find for itself a vent. Hers was by no means a visionary or unpractical temperament. If beauty and utility could be combined, well and good; but if not, utility must be established at the expense of beauty. Mr. Wheeler, in his dreamy, ideal existence, knew as little of the actual, work-a-day world as a hermit in a cell; and was consequently the most unfortunate adviser that could have fallen to Gabrielle's lot. Moreover, he had a propensity, by no means uncommon, of refusing to dismount from his hobby when once he was on its back; and he went on with his pencillings on the letter, quite unconscious that his theories were not consonant with the views of his hostess.

'I have made a rough sketch of some such cottage as I have in contemplation,' he presently observed. 'You will see at a glance what advantages it offers when compared with the cottages, or hovels, our people at present inhabit. The upstairs rooms, in particular, with ventilation to the front and the back, would promote good health, and in times of sickness prove of inestimable advantage.'

'An admirable plan!' said Harold, while Gabrielle pondered over it in silence. 'I suppose only bed-ridden persons reside upstairs, and the doctor brings a ladder of ropes in his pocket. The repose and the entire freedom from intrusion must be delightful.'

'Eh! what do you mean? Have I forgotten the staircase? That omission is easily rectified. You can introduce a staircase almost anywhere—here, for instance, at the front bedroom door.'

'Which will bring you out *vid* the oven,' said Harold, remorselessly. 'What do you think of a patent lift? Staircases are vulgar, commonplace things, and require to be scrubbed. A lift would be original, and would enable them to form some idea of the sensation of

ascending in a balloon, or descending into a coal-mine. Now a staircase is like nothing in life but a treadmill, and can but demoralise their minds, though it elevates their persons.'

'I should be very glad to see some model cottages erected here,' said Mr. Wheeler, too much absorbed in his scheme to lend an ear to Harold's profanity; 'and certainly Waife's Dingle offers considerable advantages for the plan. Yet I am disposed to think, if your mind is not set upon the cottages, that a group of almshouses would be more substantially beneficial to the district. After all, we ought to provide for the aged and infirm before we consider the wants of the young and active. I have a plan in my pocket-book that I sketched many years ago after a conversation with my dear old friend, your grandfather. It is very complete, as you may observe—somewhat in the form of an oblong, with a green in the midst, and gravel walks. In the centre of the green there should be a well with buckets. I cannot imagine how pumps were ever permitted to supersede the far more picturesque well. Primitive customs are invariably the best, and elderly people like an institution associated with their earliest memories. This group of almshouses is capable of receiving six-and-thirty pensioners. What an amount of distress you will be the means of alleviating!'

'There is one point to be considered,' suggested Gabrielle, diffidently. 'How should we fill our almshouses after they were built? We have not more than ten or twelve old people in St. Anne's, have we?'

'Not actually in St. Anne's, perhaps; but an institution of this sort, if well endowed, would be easy to fill. I don't suppose the Kettlebury people would object to come if they were sure of comfortable quarters and a maintenance. They profess to despise the Hillites, as they call them; but a gable-ended almshouse and five shillings a-week would make them change their tone, I fancy. The St. Anne's Almshouses! The title is very pleasing and euphonious.'

Gabrielle turned her head a little wearily, and met

the glance of Dr. Blyth, which was bent upon her with an expression of silent amusement. Considerable humour lurked at all times in his small, full under lip, but at this moment the fun that played round the curves of his mouth, while yet his expression of demure gravity was unrelaxed, struck Gabrielle as irresistible. She fairly smiled, and Mr. Wheeler having betaken himself to a fuller development of his scheme on a larger piece of paper, Dr. Blyth drew his chair somewhat nearer, and proceeded to gather up the dropped stitches of Gabrielle's work, where the unskilful hands of her chosen adviser had let them fall through.

'You wish to place your peasant in the way to better his own condition,' he observed. 'What should you say to cottage gardens and a gift of gardening implements?'

Gabrielle revived at once, and threw herself into the proposal with the enthusiasm that was natural to her. Dr. Blyth gave her a number of useful suggestions, drawn from practical observation of the people and their needs. He told her that a considerable portion of unreclaimed moorland was to be purchased on low terms, and he proposed that Gabrielle should buy the land, employ labourers to break, trench, dress, and enclose it, and that when once it was brought into a state of cultivation, those whose labour had effected the transformation should reap the benefit, by holding it rent free, or at a nominal rent, under Gabrielle's pleasure. The land, he said, had proved to be very prolific, when generously dealt with; and she might extend her benevolence so far as to provide dressing for the soil, even after the cottager was permitted to look upon it as his own.

'And I may pay them good wages, of course, while they are bringing it into cultivation?'

'Yes, good wages—that is, fair wages—not so good as to make them dissatisfied with other masters.'

'So, then, in my desire for improvement, I am to wage war with the wild heather which is the very delight of my life?'

'Kettlebury wilds will outlast your generation,' said Dr. Blyth, smiling.

At this moment Emma, who was soliciting for a game at 'Definitions,' interrupted the conversation, and presented both speakers with a piece of paper and a pencil. The word to be defined was the suggestive one of 'Home.'

For some moments silence reigned in the room, while every one meditated, and inscribed their thoughts on their respective slips of paper. When all had finished and twisted up their contribution after a given fashion, the papers were thrown into a small basket which Mr. Bushby presented to Miss Hope in her character of hostess.

'Am I to make them public?' said Gabrielle, and selecting one from the rest, she read aloud the following definition of 'Home'—

'A place to hang up one's hat in.'

This elicited a universal protest. 'I am sure,' said Gabrielle, 'such an impious notion can proceed from no one but yourself, Mr. Bushby.'

'No, truly—how severe you are! Miss Hope, believe me, this is far, very far, from being my view of that sacred institution,' exclaimed Mr. Bushby, with more earnestness than the case seemed to demand. 'It is Philip yonder, the scoundrel; I see it in his face.'

Miss Hope proceeded. 'A casket containing pure thoughts, and golden visions not to be exposed to the garish eye of day.'

There was a difference of opinion upon the authorship of this definition, but Gabrielle fancied she traced the impress of Mr. Wheeler's character in the high-flown, and not very practical, sentiment.

'The weary toiler's goal.'

'That is your own, Miss Hope,' said Harold. 'I recognise the sentiment at once.'

'You may recognise the congeniality of the sentiment to my own views,' said Gabrielle, 'but the definition is not mine. I think, however, I can surmise the authorship,' and indeed she felt no doubt that this terse

sentence, and the thought it embodied, proceeded from the pencil of the young doctor.

'The seed-plot of virtue—and virtue's own great reward.'

'That is Rolfe's,' said Mr. Bushby; 'it is too correct and high-sounding for meaner mortals. I wonder whether you think in that tall style, Rolfe! How awfully bored you must be with your own company! The frivolity of our light minds must be as agreeable as the almond paste on top of the bride-cake.'

'An obsolete institution, long since demolished by the inauguration of clubs.'

Every eye turned to Colonel Mostyn. 'Papa, I feel deeply mortified,' said Emma.

'My love, it is all fun, you know,' said the Colonel, reassuringly. 'We must say something.'

'But then we generally say what comes uppermost.'

'Well, my dear, the truth lies below the surface.'

'A refuge from the heartless world.' Gabrielle knew Cecilia's handwriting, and smiled at her across the room. The rest of the company attributed this paper to Miss Mostyn.

'A room where promiscuous sticks, greatcoats, boots, and pipes are *not* lying about. A hissing urn—a smiling face—a glowing fire—a hearth well swept—but not by the housemaid.'

'Good—Mr. Bushby,' said Gabrielle; while Emma exclaimed, 'Who in the world is to sweep the hearth then? Oh! I suppose it means one of those new patent grates which they call "Sylvesters." Well, they look very nice, and there are no ashes.'

'The last lingering trace of the earthly Eden.'

This fixed itself upon Miss Hope at once, but she evaded criticism by passing on hastily to the next.

'A rallying-place to which to retire when sated with society.'

'Really, Emma, you need not have taken offence at Uncle Henry's allusion to clubs. No one but yourself would have regarded society as the main object of desire, and Home merely as an inevitable alternative.'

'You twist such meanings out of words, Gabrielle,' said her cousin. 'I am sure I am very fond of home; but of course we all like society best, when we can get it.'

'You forget that you are addressing the fair recluse of Heatherbrae, Miss Mostyn,' said Mr. Bushby. 'I never show my world-worn countenance here without a guilty conviction that I am invading the solitude of a devotee.'

'A devotee who contrives to make herself and her friends very comfortable,' said Philip, from the depths of a luxurious easy-chair.

'I certainly think my cousin's retirement from the world is as palatable as it well could be under the circumstances,' said Emma. 'She contrives to enjoy the charms of society without quitting the rallying-place of home.'

'Really, Emma, you ought to retire from society after such a speech as that,' exclaimed Gabrielle. 'Did you ever hear of the wolf who accused the lamb that was drinking below of disturbing the water?'

When Gabrielle went upstairs, after her guests had departed, she found a white and wistful face in her dressing-room awaiting her. She took Aileen's hand in hers with a kind smile, and asked whether she had been well cared for by Molly.

'Yes, indeed, I have had everything I could want, and I should not be standing idle now if I only knew what I ought to be doing; but I do not know the place of anything, and Molly could not tell me, so I thought you would wish me to wait till you came.'

'Quite right—but—what is your name?—Aileen! Well, Aileen, understand, I do not wish you to look upon yourself as my servant. You will have no menial duties to perform, and it is so evident to me that your birth and education are far above your circumstances, that I wish to look upon you more in the light of a companion. I am tolerably independent, but the little assistance I require you shall render.'

'Call me what you will, ma'am,' said Aileen, eagerly,

'but you must allow me to consider myself in all respects as your maid, and you must give to me the directions you used to give to your maid. Nothing will be a trouble to me—I shall consider nothing menial that I do for you; only try me, you will soon be convinced.'

'I am already convinced of your earnestness and sincerity,' said Gabrielle, smiling, 'but I have no intention of yielding. God forbid that I should permit you to hold any position in my house that might hereafter injure your prospects. You are my companion, and be sure I will tell you whatever I may wish you to do. Sometimes you shall brush my hair, but to-night you shall sit down and talk to me while I brush it myself. Are you feeling tired?'

'Oh! no, not tired at all. Pray, pray, ma'am, let me brush it for you. You do not know what real pleasure it will give me. You cannot, you must not refuse me,' and Aileen's dark eyes filled with tears.

'Yes, indeed, I can,' said Gabrielle, decisively, as she let down her long fair hair, and began to pass the brush over it. 'These are early times to begin to show signs of insubordination, Aileen. You have nothing to do but obey me, and sit still. Do you know that there is one point we have not yet considered? you have asked me for no salary, and I have not told you what I propose to give you.'

'No money, please,' exclaimed Aileen. 'I know you will give me all I want, and that will not be much; and when my dresses are worn out, you will let me wear your old ones. I shall like that better than money.'

'No, no; that would be false kindness, and make you feel painfully dependent. It will be better for both of us that I should give you a fixed salary.'

'Not if you do not allow me to earn it, ma'am. I do not see how I am to earn even the home and the kindness you are already giving me.'

'Indeed, you shall earn them, Aileen, though not in precisely the way you expect. I do not wish you to

address me as "ma'am." I feel sure you will never be wanting in respect, and it is painful to me to hear the same address from you that I have been used to hear from my servants. Has Molly shown you the room I have had prepared for you ?'

'She took me there first of all. I never expected to have such a pretty, comfortable, little room, and so near your own. If I can only be useful to you and please you, I shall be too happy,' and once more Aileen's eyes filled with tears.

'Poor child ! Some day, when you feel at home here and know me better, you shall tell me something of your past life. Are you glad to feel sheltered from the buffetings of the world, Aileen ?'

'So glad ! so thankful ! I thought—oh ! I can never tell you half I thought and dreaded ! The last few weeks have been like years of horror. I fancied every fearful catastrophe I had ever heard of was in store for me. At first I imagined the worst thing that could happen was death, but by degrees I learned to think that the grievance was that death was sometimes so long in coming, and that, by some means or other, life would be sustained till all my fears were realised.'

'What were your fears ?'

'They were vague fears, but full of terror. I thought of the union and the workhouse, and the being herded with low and bad people ; my clothes worn out, so that I could not try to retrieve my position, and then, perhaps, being treated as an outcast, my story disbelieved, and then sickness, and disease, and death in a hospital. Oh ! death began to look very sweet then.'

'But now you are given back to life again, and may spend such a life as to make death no less sweet when it comes, and for a better reason than because life is not worth the living.'

'I hope so—I will try to do so—and you will teach me.'

'Oh ! no,' said Gabrielle, with a sigh ; 'I dare say I could better learn of you, for sometimes life is wearisome even to me. Wealth, position, and friends do not necessarily constitute happiness.'

'No, but they must promote it surely? I say "surely," for I never possessed any one of the three.'

'I hardly know whether they do or not. I have never known what it was to be without them. My own conviction is, Aileen, that few blessings which are purely temporal bring any lively sense of enjoyment, unless they are the fruit of toil and personal effort.

It is the battle, not the prize,
That fills the hero's breast with joy;
And industry the bliss supplies,
Which mere possession would destroy.

I should not wonder if, at this very moment, your heart was lighter than mine.'

'My heart is very light,' said Aileen, with eyes that danced in the firelight.

'Already, poor child! how soon you forget! Who would imagine that a few days ago you were homeless and nearly houseless.'

'God found me a house and a home,' said Aileen, in a subdued tone of reverent joy. 'He brought you to me, and if I should be able to please you I shall be quite, quite happy.'

Gabrielle heard in silence, marvelling much at this wondrous contentment of spirit, and contrasting it with her own unsatisfied longings and useless repinings.

'We will try to help each other,' she said, after some minutes spent in silence, and with a humility of tone that made Aileen long to fall at her feet. 'I see that there is much that I can learn of you; and you, for your part, must try to imitate all you can find of good in me, and avoid all that is evil. My life has been much more worldly than yours, and I should be very sorry to see you drift away from your simplicity. But, thank God! I have shaken off much of the outward worldliness of my life, and in this quiet country home I am able to choose my own pursuits, and see as much or as little of the world as I please.'

'Are you tired of a gay life?' asked Aileen, with a look of intense interest and affection.

‘Very tired, very weary—altogether surfeited ;—it would have been more dangerous to me if I had had less of it. Now, I shall allow you to talk no more to-night. Go to bed and rest yourself. To-morrow we will arrange about your duties.’

Gabrielle retired to her room to ponder over her own life and character in the new light thrown upon it by the force of contrast, and to make earnest resolutions to prove a wise friend to the young girl thus thrown upon her compassion ; while Aileen knelt at her bedside, and sobbed out the overflowing thankfulness of her heart to the Friend upon whom she had long learned to rely in seasons of joy as well as of trouble.

CHAPTER XIV.

Whirling o'er hillocks, ruts, and stones,
Enough to dislocate one's bones,
We home return, a wondrous token
Of Heaven's kind care, with limbs unbroken.

Jenyns.

THE weather cleared before the day arrived for the promised expedition to Plover's Nest.

A waggonette had been procured for Colonel Mostyn and his daughter, and two of the gentlemen, and Gabrielle, with a persistency that well-nigh amounted to rudeness, insisted upon driving Miss Tudor in her own pony-carriage, and made Mr. Arkwright much elated, and Mr. Bushby nearly distracted, by inviting the former gentleman to occupy the vacant seat in the pony carriage.

Colonel Mostyn was little prepared for the jolting that awaited him, and when a desperate road across the common finally terminated in a narrow precipitous lane, with ruts on either side, a foot and a half in depth, and the space between the ruts plentifully spread with loose stones, the effort to preserve his equilibrium with dignity

proved almost too much for a temper at no time the most amiable. The expression of his companions' faces, ripe for amusement, and ready to make fun out of even his miseries, contributed to aggrrieve him, and he vented as much of his snappishness upon Emma as he deemed consistent with good manners.

'The name is well chosen,' said Emma. 'I am curious to see the house to which this is the approach.'

'Mrs. Melville showed great judgment in the choice of her own conveyance,' said Mr. Bushby. 'She avoids these prodigious ruts in her donkey-chair. Perhaps she would favour us with a loan of it to facilitate the return of some of our party.'

The Colonel looked round sharply. 'Abominable roads!' he muttered. 'I think Miss Hope must be out of her mind to settle in such a neighbourhood, and visit people who live in such localities.'

'I think Gabrielle is a little out of her mind,' said Emma, pleasantly.

'Sudden fortunes generally make people absurd,' said the Colonel, with his own playful sneer.

'Better be rich and absurd than poor and caustic,' said Harold, impulsively; adding hurriedly, 'Here's Rolfe, poor fellow, for instance—the most satirical wretch in the world, without a five-pound note to his name.'

'May I ask how you procure your information?' demanded Mr. Rolfe, at the same time producing his pocket-book, and drawing two Bank of England notes out of one of the pockets.

'My dear fellow, is that your name?' asked Harold, pointing to the signature of the cashier.

Mr. Rolfe repocketed his book in dignified silence, and presently the precipitous road ended in a village street, and the carriage drew up at a wicket-gate, enclosing a pretty garden and grassplot, and a somewhat picturesque cottage dwelling.

Miss Hope had arrived some ten minutes earlier, and the party were assembled beneath a lime-tree in the garden. The hostess was seated on the grass in placid content-

ment, and, with an air of drowsy satisfaction extended both hands to the newcomers, observing in her mellow and somewhat languid tones,—

‘I am so glad to see you. I hope you have not had a very distressing journey. How do you do? how do you do? I know you will excuse my rising. It is a fatigue to me, and there is no one here who can let me down again.’

‘Well, Uncle Henry,’ said Gabrielle, on whom her uncle’s air of ruffled equanimity was not lost—‘what do you think of Kettlebury roads?’

‘Atrocious!’ ejaculated her uncle, concentrating all his spleen into a single word. ‘A disgrace to the parish—indeed, a disgrace to the county, and, if you come to that, a disgrace to any civilised land that such roads should be in existence!’

‘We weap one advantage fwom our dweadful woads,’ lisped pretty Miss Melville, good-humouredly, ‘that only those fwiends who weally like us and pwize our acquaintance take the twouble to come and see us. We get vewy few complimentawy visits.’

‘Pon my life, I should think so!’ ejaculated the Colonel, involuntarily, oblivious for the moment of the politeness which usually characterised his intercourse with ladies. ‘I mean to say that it is a pity that the road should present any obstacles to those who desire to visit this charming retreat.’

‘We make our friends very welcome when they do come,’ said Mrs. Melville, composedly, ‘and even our comparative isolation has its compensations. I am able to devote myself to my farming operations in a manner I could not do if my time was more taken up by society. I have been very busy the last day or two ploughing the two-acre field at the back of the house. Araunah and Samuel—I mean my butler and gardener—are very good lads, and we had to hire nothing but the plough. We yoked the donkeys to the plough, and I sat on a camp-stool in the corner of the field and saw that the work was done well and thoroughly.’

‘My dear Mrs. Melville!’ exclaimed Gabrielle,

'how clever you must be! How have you ever arrived at a knowledge of farming operations?'

'Books,' replied Mrs. Melville—'books and practical experiments. There is nothing we cannot do if we have books to learn from, and sense to apply what we learn. I will not say that my farming has always been a profitable occupation, but I gain knowledge by every failure, and we are quite on the right system now, there can be no doubt of that.'

'Have you ever had the fortitude to calculate the cost of each turnip and potato you produce?' asked Harold, with the winning pleasantry of manner that invariably took the edge off his home-thrusts.

'They cost me a good deal of fatigue and vexation of spirit,' said Mrs. Melville, smiling. 'As for the money, I don't see much use in keeping accounts until your operations are in good working order, and likely to prove profitable. There must always be a considerable outlay for some years, and the constant study of the debit side of your account-book is apt to become depressing. When once a certain point has been reached, the returns are rapid and gratifying. I trust in the course of a short period to reach that desirable point.'

'Mamma,' said Louisa Melville, with a merry glance at the company, 'you have been saying that for eight years. The good time is always coming and never comes!'

'It is very ungrateful of you, Louisa, to say so,' observed Mrs. Melville. 'You will reap the benefit of my labours even if I never do so, and you never take any share in my trouble and fatigue.'

'We thought you would like a game of croquet,' said Louisa to Gabrielle. 'It is a pity to go into the house while it is so pleasant out of doors. We have a very fair croquet-ground. Mamma, you will play of course—you are so devoted to croquet.'

'Yes, certainly, I will play,' said Mrs. Melville, cordially. 'Call Araunah, Louisa; if I am going to play I must get up.'

The lank lad, with the awkward space between

trouser and shoe, presently responded to the summons, with a respectfulness in his demeanour that amply atoned for deficiencies in attire. With the aid of his two hands, and a well-timed and vigorous pull, acquired by constant practice, Mrs. Melville contrived to raise herself into an erect position. The guests, meanwhile, looked on, careful to avoid meeting one another's eyes, and only enabled to restrain their amusement by the composure of the principal performer.

The game of croquet was entered upon with spirit. There were many good players, and Mrs. Melville threw herself into the game with the languid earnestness natural to her.

When it had proceeded for more than an hour, Mrs. Melville proposed some coffee, and Araunah was summoned, and desired to prepare it. The sight, and above all the fragrance, of the steaming coffee, through the open French windows, proved very grateful to the guests, slightly fatigued by their rugged journey. They soon, however, discovered that they were but being tantalised by the mirage of the desert.

'Coffee already!' observed Mrs. Melville; 'how tiresome! just as the game is really beginning to grow interesting. Never mind, the coffee can wait; we could not drink it scalding hot, and it would be a pity to break into the game at this critical point.'

Half-an-hour elapsed, during which time the interest of the game increased, while more than one guest cast a regretful glance at the distant clouds of steam which were becoming beautifully less. The hostess and her daughter were both so much absorbed in the game that even Mr. Bushby's suggestive exclamation at the fragrance of the smell of coffee, which fragrance, by the bye, had long since evaporated, produced no effect.

Another half-hour likewise glided into the past, and the interest of the game still increased. It happened at length that Mrs. Melville was playing remarkably well, and her daughter chanced to be the sufferer through her skill.

'Mamma, what about the coffee?' asked Miss Melville, suddenly, struck by a happy suggestion.

'The coffee! Oh, I declare I had forgotten it! Well, never mind, it must be cold now, and nothing is more disagreeable than cold coffee. Order dinner, Louisa. We shall have finished the game by the time dinner is served.'

Miss Melville called lightly for some moments to Arau—nah! and at length the butler made his appearance, and received his orders with a bow.

In another half-hour he pronounced dinner to be served; but alas! the interest had just culminated, and the famished guests had to listen with a ghastly acquiescence to their hostess's remark, that a good game of croquet was worth all the dinners in the world. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes elapsed, during which Harold Bushby's pantomimic gestures of inanition and disappointment, every time he found himself safe from the observation of his hostesses, taxed some of his friends more severely than the pangs of hunger.

Happily the game at length drew to a close, and Mrs. Melville, being on the winning side, congratulated herself and her party that no minor considerations had been allowed to mar their triumph. The ladies were taken upstairs to revise their toilets, and in some ten minutes more were permitted to enter the dining-room, where not a few gazed with curiosity at the dinner which was supposed to stand on the table, without injury, for three-quarters of an hour on a chilly September afternoon.

At the amount provided, or the quality of the provisions, the most exacting gourmand and the most fastidious epicure could have taken no exception. Mrs. Melville was the very soul of hospitality, and generous to profusion. But, as the cooking had been accomplished by a maiden of fourteen, assisted by two extra maidens of twelve and eleven, it was no matter for surprise that the ducks were cooked only on the surface, the beef dried up to a cinder, the greens of a dull olive colour, the melted butter like paste, the gravy like train oil—

and the whole set and cold. Mr. Bushby whispered to his neighbour, Gabrielle, that he was no longer at a loss to account for the hostess's sublime indifference to dinner. But never was he more mistaken in a conjecture. Mrs. Melville observed nothing amiss in the dinner. Her own appetite was sharpened by the excitement of the game, and the consequent delay; and she not only pressed her guests most cordially to do justice to the repast, but genially set them the example. Some cold fowl was pounced upon and distributed by Harold, and those whose appetites were delicate were thankful to him for this and various other manœuvres.

Perhaps the most amusing occupation was to watch Colonel Mostyn, as his fastidious delicacy of taste did battle with his desire to be courteous. Grieved as he was to send away his plate filled with half-cooked and wholly cold viands, he felt that he should be doubly grieved to have eaten them. He contrived with much care and skill to manipulate his knife and fork assiduously until Araunah, the butler, or James, the gardener, were at his elbow, and then to hurry off the objectionable plate, while he covered the stratagem by an earnest request that Miss Melville would humour him in the old-fashioned indulgence of taking wine with a lady.

A close attention to the matter in hand did not prevent the hostess from making herself exceedingly agreeable at the head of the table. She was rich in anecdote, and told a story with inimitable humour, never joining in the laugh she raised, but maintaining a placid gravity of countenance in the midst of descriptions that convulsed the company with merriment. Indeed, but for the humorous dryness of her phraseology, and a certain mirthful twinkle in the eye, you might almost have entertained a doubt whether she herself fully perceived the force of the tales she told; but the secret of Mrs. Melville's success lay in the recognition of the well-worn maxim, '*Ars est celare artem.*'

The conversation chancing to turn upon agriculture,

and the description of agriculturist who farmed the small tenements which the party from Heatherbrae had passed in the morning, Mrs. Melville instantly produced from the storehouse of her memory an anecdote referring to the class in question.

‘Some of the men who held small farmsteads in Kettlebury Common and the neighbourhood,’ she observed, ‘were in former times singularly tall, broad-shouldered, powerfully-built men. Rough of speech, and unscrupulous in action, they were yet straightforward, honest specimens of an intermediate grade, somewhat above the ordinary labourer, yet far below the English “yeoman.” Once a week they carried the produce of their soil and homestead to the city market, some ten or twelve miles distant. On these occasions, when business was over, they would reassemble at some second-rate public-house on the outskirts of the city, talk over their luck, and drink no inconsiderable portion of their receipts.

‘One day three burly fellows of this description met at the “Blue Boar,” and were already deep in their potations, when they were joined by a smart, dapper postilion, somewhat under size, who had likewise pulled up here to water his horses. Leaving his carriage and horses in the courtyard, without unharnessing the latter, he sat down for a few minutes with the three farmers, and as topics of mutual interest were limited, they presently fell to comparing notes on their respective muscular strength. The agriculturists told many a tale of their own Herculean exploits, but when the little postilion ventured to bring forward his own claims for consideration, he was laughed to scorn by the unmannerly Goths, and more than one iron fist caused him to reel again. Discretion being the better part of valour, he lowered his tone. “Ah! my fine fellows, I admit that I am no match for you in point of strength, but there is one thing in which I will defy any one of you—and that is in lifting weights.”

‘The giants sneered contemptuously, and observed that “Brag was a good dog.”

"But Holdfast was a better," retorted the little man, sharply. "Look ye here. I'll engage to lift all three of ye at once with one hand, and if I lose, I'll stand a glass of half-and-half all round."

'The three winked at one another, and professed themselves willing to submit to the test.

'A rope was found, and the half-drunken farmers rolled out into the courtyard, where they stretched themselves on the ground in a triple embrace, while the dapper little man wound the rope round and round them, until they looked more like a bale of goods than three specimens of muscular development. Then, seizing his postilion's whip, with leather thong, he belaboured the hapless trio with a hearty good-will—rolling them over and over that each might have a fair share of his favours, while the miserable victims, with their impotent rage, and rotatory expletives, convulsed the inhabitants of the inn and the hangers-on of the yard with uncontrollable laughter. Discretion being again the better part of valour, the now-appeased little man sprang into his saddle, lifted his elbow in token of parting good-will to the bale of humanity still writhing on the pavement, and, cracking his whip, drove off, bidding them a long farewell.'

This story created some amusement, and by the time it was concluded the first course had been removed from the table. Every one knows the dreary interval that elapses between the courses when the cook and waiters are inexperienced, and a dinner party an exceptional event. Mrs. Melville, however, was ready with another story.

'Talking of mutton,' she observed, in allusion to a remark made by Mr. Rolfe upon South American and Australian mutton, 'a friend of mine told me a story the other day, for the truth of which he vouched, and I will give it to you upon his authority.

'Some time since a gentleman was travelling amongst the Irish lakes, when towards evening he arrived at a small inn where he proposed to spend the night. On entering, he enquired what he could have for dinner.

"Anything yer honour plases," replied the waiter, with a strong brogue, and an air of lofty hospitality.

"Well, but what have you in the house?"

"Everything, yer honour!—bafé, mutton, vale, poultury, vin'son, fish—but for moi parrt I'd ricommind the mutton."

"I'm not particularly fond of mutton. Did you say you had venison?"

"Bafé, mutton, vale, poultury, ghame and fish," repeated the accommodating waiter; "but if ye take me advice ye'll have mutton."

"But I don't care about mutton, my good friend, and with such a choice I should prefer something else—poultry for instance."

"Sure! an' yer honour knows best," said the waiter, in a tone of mild deprecation, "and, as I said afore, can plase yerself, but still, if yer *did* take moi advice ye'd have—mutton."

"No, no, we all know best what pleases ourselves, and I'll have the poultry."

"As yer honour plases," said the waiter, dropping his voice, and slowly retreating through the open doorway. Then, popping his head once again inside the door, he whispered in tones of warning solemnity, "If yer honour 'ud only take moi advice."

"But I won't, so there's an end of it."

"I' faith! ye moight do worrse!" was faintly wafted back into the apartment, as he finally disappeared.

Ten minutes elapsed, and at the expiration of that time the waiter re-appeared with a crestfallen air, and observed in an apologetic tone,

"Sure, an' its sorry I am to hev to tell yer honour, but the vin'son's hung till 'tis all alive, the bafé's fresh kilt, the fish is stale, the poultury 'll have to be pluckt, to-morra 's the day for the vale, and as for the——"

"Bless the man! Is there nothing I can have then?"

"Mutton, yer honour—mutton—mutton, SURE, with all the pleasure in loife! Any jint of mutton that may

plase yer honour. Your honour may remember, its the very advice I was givin.'"

This story was received with considerable applause, but still the second course appeared not. Mrs. Melville delivered anecdote after anecdote, and the guests made frantic efforts to keep up the conversation between whiles, yet, in spite of all, more than one 'awful pause' fell on the party. No sounds or symptoms of the second course reached the apartment. Still Mrs. Melville retained her air of superb composure. She was truly a proficient in the art of self-command. When a quarter of an hour had elapsed she was as much mistress of the position as at the commencement, and but for Miss Melville's occasional glance at the door you might have imagined that this interval was fore-ordained out of consideration for the digestive organs.

At length welcome sounds were heard without, and as Araunah opened the door, the flagging conversation suddenly ceased, as though the need for exertion were over. Slowly, and with a solemn aspect, Araunah, empty-handed, proceeded up the room, until he stood by the side of his mistress, when, amid an ominous silence, he made in despairing tones the appalling announcement—

'Plaze 'm the pudden have a busted!'

A roar of laughter greeted this information, but Araunah's solemnity was not impaired, and Mrs. Melville was still unruffled.

'Tell Elizabeth I am very—much—surprised—in-deed. However, you had better bring it in, and I hope it will never happen again.'

A dish of hotch-potch presently appeared, of which raisins, currants, suet and flour, plentifully intermixed with hot water, were the principal ingredients. To the infinite relief of the guests, some blancmange and stewed pears appeared simultaneously, so that their good breeding was not put to the severe test of eating or rejecting the hapless pudding.

CHAPTER XV.

A striking book, yet not a startling book,

Good things, not subtle, new yet orthodox.

Aurora Leigh.

WHEN dinner was concluded, Miss Melville took advantage of the retirement to the drawing-room to whisper a request into Gabrielle's ear.

'Miss Hope, do come to my room. I have a great favour to ask of you.'

Gabrielle assented, and was conducted through the rambling passages of an old house, into a small upstairs apartment, which she at first mistook for a lumber-room. She was presently enlightened by Miss Melville proceeding to do the honours of her boudoir. A large wickerwork cage, containing some turtle-doves, was moved to make room for the visitor, and being elevated to the top of an old cottage piano, already well piled with music, looked in imminent danger of toppling over. Boxes of all shapes and sizes crowded the room, and in the window stood a wirework flower-stand, containing a few sickly nurslings, drooping for lack of water. Sundry garments for poor people, in an unfinished state, some illuminated church-texts, and a basket full of tracts and books for poor people, bore testimony to the kindness of Miss Melville's heart, if not to the love of order that reigned in her soul. In addition to this, a pile of well-thumbed novels stood on one table, and a snow-storm of closely written manuscripts had fallen upon the entire apartment.

'I have such a favour to ask of you, Miss Hope,' said Louisa, mysteriously, as she closed and locked the door, and found a comfortable box for her friend to sit upon. 'I know you will keep my secret. The truth is that I am writing a novel. No one has seen it yet, and I have for some time been very anxious to get an un-

prejudiced opinion upon it. I have been told that you are very clever, and I am particularly desirous of having the benefit of your opinion.'

'I can't imagine who could have told you so,' said Gabrielle, who was by no means elated at her position.

'Mr. Bushby told me so. He said most likely you wrote books yourself under cover of some *nom-de-plume*, and innumerable papers for magazines, short tales, and poems.'

'Me!' exclaimed Gabrielle, laughing. 'I never wrote anything but a letter in my life.'

'Oh! well, I dare say you have read plenty of novels, if you haven't written them; and, after all, even writing them is not so difficult as people imagine. I am quite astonished at my own success; but perhaps I am not so good a judge of my own productions as a stranger would be.'

'Are all these closely written sheets a part of your novel?'

'Yes, but I have a great deal more that you have not seen—this drawer, for instance, nearly full. Unfortunately I wrote it all on loose sheets of paper, as some one told me that was the way, and I stupidly forgot to number the pages, so that I find it rather confusing when I want to read any of it straight off. I think I can find the commencement, however, as my eye fell upon it yesterday somewhere or other, and, between ourselves, I think the commencement is everything. I always know whether I shall like a novel or not by the first page.'

'The opening is certainly very important,' said Gabrielle.

'And here it is! How extremely fortunate! But, first of all, I must tell you the title—so much depends upon the title, and I wish my novel to be very original in every respect. I have called it "Glow, Glimmer, and Gloom." I think that will be a very original title, don't you?—and alliteration is very attractive and quite the fashion.'

'I never before heard any title at all like it,' replied Gabrielle.

‘It opens, too, in a very spirited and original manner; at least, I hope you will think so. Please listen to the opening paragraph:—

“The night was intensely dark. Lurid flashes of forked lightning cleft the heavens, and illumined with their fiery splendour the black and towering hills that fenced the horizon. The distant thunder pealed ominously over their dark and mountainous summits. A silence that might be felt reigned around. The bat on gloomy wing flitted by. The awful note of the screech-owl pierced the air. He knelt on the bare hill-side and uncovered his head amid the grandeur of his native scenes. It was a moment to strike awe into the hardest breast.”

‘It must have been, indeed,’ said Gabrielle, sympathetically. ‘I have only one criticism to make. It may be an old-fashioned prejudice, but is it not incorrect to begin a tale with the use of a pronoun unattached to a substantive?’

‘Oh! no, indeed,’ said Louisa, eagerly, ‘I have the best authority for it. I could show you a novel by a popular novelist of the day, in which she begins just in the same manner as I do. You must not ask me to give up that. It is the very cream of the opening.’

‘I beg pardon,’ said Gabrielle, smiling; ‘only for the moment I fancied it was the screech-owl that knelt amid the grandeur of his native scenes. You know I do not profess to be a critic.’

‘Oh! but I wish you to criticise as much as possible. Perhaps before I read any more I had better tell you the plot. I think you will say it is quite a new plot. It is sensational, you know, because nothing goes down now but sensational books; but the making a man marry two wives at once, or a woman two husbands, always appeared to me rather vulgar, to say nothing of its being very *hackneyed*. Now, I have discovered a sort of compromise, which is just as sensational, without being so offensive. My hero and heroine are to be divorced, and after a long time the husband meets the wife again, and does not know her, on account of her

being so much altered. He falls in love with her, and actually does not discover that she was his first wife till after they are married.'

'Really! what a singular plot! It is very original. But I should fancy it was beset with difficulties.'

'Oh! none that may not be overcome by a little ingenuity. But let me hear what difficulties you apprehend.'

'Well, for one thing, I cannot imagine the wife to be sufficiently altered for the husband not to recognise her.'

'Oh! you have forgotten "East Lynne." The wife came back to be governess to her own children, and no one knew her.'

'But then, if I remember aright, she was seamed and scarred, and wore blue spectacles and a wig, and some monstrous kind of head-gear. She would not prove very attractive to the hero under such circumstances.'

Miss Melville pondered for a moment. 'I thought of that, and it occurred to me that perhaps the hero might have become blind in the interval, and have fallen in love with the tones of her voice, which reminded him of his first wife. This would obviate all difficulty.'

'Perhaps it might, but then she could not be married under a feigned name, and so her husband would discover her identity.'

'Ah! but she is to have married some one else in the meantime, and so have changed her name, and the second husband is to be killed in war, or in a duel, or die of a fever, or something.'

'But don't you think one's interest would have flagged by the time the hero was blind and the heroine twice married, and old and scarred and ugly?'

'Oh! no, you forget "Aurora Leigh" and "East Lynne." Besides, one might contrive some means of making the heroine good-looking again in the end. The only difficulty I see is in the title.'

'I suppose the triple title has reference to the different phases of feeling through which the parties pass?'

'Just so; but the awkward part is that the commencement is the gloomy epoch, and the conclusion finds them all in the glow of sunshine. But you know "Gloom, Glimmer, and Glow," does not sound half so well as the words do the other way.'

'But if the hero is to settle down into lifelong blindness, I should think "Gloom" would aptly describe his condition.'

'Well, there is something in that. But now I have another perplexity to consult you upon. I am afraid it will be impossible to compress the whole story into less than four or five volumes. Do you think public opinion is very much against more than three?'

'I am inclined to think that it is.'

'But, you know, it would be such a pity to cut out any of the striking scenes. There is quite a volume about their married life at home, showing how happy they were, until differences arose between them. Then, after the divorce, there is a tour made by the heroine all over the continent, with a full description of all the popular places of resort, which is sure to be very interesting to the public. That takes up quite another volume. Then there is the account of the second marriage, and the death of that husband, and all the accidents through which the heroine became disfigured—for which you can't allow less than another volume. Then there is her return to England, and her introduction to her first husband, who is now blind, and the courtship and marriage, and finally the *dénouement*, all of which can't be squeezed into less than another volume. Then it would be as well to give a glimpse of their subsequent life; and, I am sure, what I call the improving part of the novel—the serious conversations and moral reflections—must be quite equal to a volume by themselves.'

'Don't you think it would be well to curtail these, as you have such an abundance of material? I never remember reading so much serious conversation in a novel.'

'Oh! you are quite mistaken. Now this,' and Miss

Melville raised a book from the table, 'is quite a standard novel, and has been exceedingly popular, and yet a single conversation at the end of the third volume is some fifty or sixty pages in length. I counted them yesterday, but I won't be quite certain as to the number. The moral of the whole story is summed up and set forth in this conversation. For my own part I should not feel justified in giving a work to the public that was not calculated to improve them in a moral and religious point of view.'

'You know best, of course,' said Gabrielle, a little wearily; 'but do you not think if the book has any force in it, the moral will make its way to the mind of the reader without adventitious aid? The summing up of a moral at the end of a tale always reminds me of the act of a child, who, having drawn a monstrosity with four legs and a head, feels compelled to elucidate the matter by writing underneath, "This is a Cow."'

'Indeed, I cannot see the slightest resemblance. You must remember that we write for obtuse, as well as discerning, readers.'

'Suppose, then, you were to omit some of the descriptions of foreign parts. These things are so common now, and, after all, Murray is so excellent. . . .'

'Oh! but some of these were made on the spot. Mamma and I spent three months on the continent last year, and I kept a journal all the time, and it would be such a pity not to make use of it. Besides, as to Murray, a good deal of mine is Murray, so that it may quite be relied upon. I wouldn't part with any of my descriptions for the whole world.'

'As I said before, you are much the best judge of these matters,' repeated Gabrielle, rising. 'I hope you will put me down for six copies of the work when it is published. I am afraid I have proved to you the truth of my statement, that my advice would not be worth much.'

'Oh! you have been very kind,—and I am sure I am immensely obliged to you. Would you like to take some of the manuscript with you, and read it at your leisure? I could make you up a nice packet, and if the

pages were not exactly right it would not signify, now that you know the plot.'

'Thank you,' said Gabrielle, hastily; 'but I fear this would destroy the interest with which I should read it in print. I much prefer a slight exercise of patience, in order that I may judge of it as a whole. I think, by the by, it must be getting late, and Uncle Henry will be wishing to return home.'

'Oh! must you go? I am so sorry. A little literary sympathy is such a treat; for mamma, you know, treats all my compositions as waste paper, and says I shall lose a great deal of money by publishing. I am sure mamma is the very last person who ought to say a word, for no one knows how much money a farming hobby runs away with. As for novels, I believe they always pay—don't you now, Miss Hope?—if there is only enough of incident and sensation about them.'

'I think I should be a little fearful of making a first attempt in four or five volumes,' said Gabrielle; 'the risk upon two or three volumes would be considerably less.'

'But what could you say in two volumes? Oh! Miss Hope, you have none of the fire or enthusiasm of an author! You talk of cutting up a work as coolly as Solomon talked of cutting up the baby. But, you know, the real mother was *fiwantic* at the idea.'

'Perhaps the real mother is the best judge after all,' replied Gabrielle, only anxious to depart; but, having cleared the doorway, she ventured to add, 'the simile only holds good, from your point of view, as far as the real mother is concerned. We ought not to forget that the make-believe mother, whom we will suppose to be represented by the Public, preferred the infant in a mutilated state.'

'Ah! you do not talk like a mother or an author,' said Louisa, with a kind forbearance. 'The false mother, remember, was dispossessed by the wise man, and the rights of the true mother restored to her. That settles the question, I think.'

'Yet that would be an awkward sequel in the case of your literary child,' said Gabrielle, who was now fairly

on the staircase. 'What would you do with four thousand volumes, fresh and unmutilated from the publisher's hands?'

'No simile will bear being pushed to its utmost significance,' retorted Louisa. 'We are becoming entangled and confused, for the baby cannot by any possibility be divided into four, or four thousand volumes, so there the likeness must cease.'

'Very well,—only remember to put me down for six copies, and pardon my suggestions. I told you, remember, at the beginning, that I knew nothing about the matter.'

Louisa, being apparently practically convinced that this was, after all, indeed the true state of the case, allowed the subject to drop, and Gabrielle, having ordered the carriages, gave notice to her friends that it was time to start.

CHAPTER XVI.

Take this word,
And let it stop you as a generous man
From speaking farther.— *Aurora Leigh*.

THE light pony-chaise arrived at the door first, and Gabrielle, having made her adieux, and summoned Mr. Arkwright, settled herself and Miss Tudor into the front seat, and, her cavalier having sprung in lightly behind, drove off at a smart pace.

It was now past seven o'clock, and the waning light threatened, ere long, to render lamps a necessity. Mrs. Melville had suggested a longer, but more civilised, route home, and no one was sorry to be spared the unmerciful jolting they had experienced in the morning.

'Well, Cecilia, have you enjoyed your visit to the Plover's Nest? I think, at least, you must have been

entertained by a very original development of character. Mrs. Melville is delightful.'

'She certainly has the kindest heart and the most hospitable disposition in the world,' said Miss Tudor. 'To be sure, it is an odd fancy to live in that scrambling manner, with boys and girls for men and maid servants—but every one to his taste, and Mrs. Melville appears to be supremely contented with her establishment.'

'She is so; I am disposed to think that her ideality is so large, that she literally does not see things as they are. Her imagination invests commonplace materials with a colouring that does not really belong to them. Depend upon it, this is a most enviable faculty. How much more often does one find a person disposed to rob everyday life of the charm that may truly be said to belong to it! "Some gather poison from flowers, while others make honey from weeds."'

'Surely, Ella, you would not like to live in this fashion.'

'Certainly not; I envy Mrs. Melville, not for her ménage, but for the frame of mind that makes her so supremely blest. I can scarcely imagine that placid temper ever being ruffled.'

'You must allow me to bestow a little compassion upon Miss Melville.'

'Not at all; she rides her own hobby as persistently as her mother, and I think she enjoys the mode of life. She is also sweet-tempered and placid to a degree, and deserves our admiration rather than our compassion.'

'You astonish me, Ella!'

'Do I?' said Gabrielle, laughing. 'Let me explain what I mean. After all, it is not of much importance in this world whether we live in a Plover's Nest or a Palace, but it is of importance that wherever we live, it should be, so far as our tempers are concerned, on the sunny, and not on the shady, side of the road. In this particular I think Mrs. and Miss Melville are to be envied.'

They drove on for some time, still lightly talking over the incidents of the day, when Gabrielle remarked, 'I

trust we shall be in no danger of losing our way, but I confess Mrs. Melville's second turns, and third turns, and rights and lefts, and straight-forwards are becoming a little confused in my mind. Mr. Arkwright, if you are not in dreamland, I shall feel obliged by your assistance.'

'Unfortunately I am in dreamland,' said a voice that was not Mr. Arkwright's. 'You have rudely awakened me from the most delicious reverie, Miss Hope, in which the tones of your voice appeared to me like strains of the most exquisite music. Alack a day! but I fear the tones that next salute my ear will be somewhat less melodious.'

'Mr. Bushby! you are without exception the most daring, the most presuming, the most aggravating person I ever had the ill-fortune to meet with,' exclaimed Gabrielle, in a tone of very real annoyance. 'What extenuation have you to plead for this open defiance of my wishes?'

'Only the mild remonstrance of the needle to the loadstone,' said Harold, in the meekest of voices. 'You attracted, and I could not but follow.'

'And where, pray, is Mr. Arkwright?'

'Where, indeed? still hunting, probably, for his hat. Never mind; I dare say Mrs. and Miss Melville are very kind to him.'

'Was he hunting for his hat when I drove off?'

'He was, and I'm morally certain he's hunting for it now, unless Mrs. Melville has lent him her mauve-coloured bonnet. Where should you guess it to be, Miss Hope?'

'I will not do you the injustice of supposing you capable of knowing,' said Gabrielle, in the most indignant tone she could assume.

'No—ah! no; very true,' said Harold, temporarily extinguished. 'I was only thinking of guessing. How odd it would be, supposing—I'm only supposing, you know—that it should turn up to-morrow morning in the library, on the bust of the late Mr. Melville! However, I trust this is not probable, for in such a case the

next bulletin from Plover's Nest might bring us news of some catastrophe even more serious than the spontaneous combustion of the pudding.'

'You try to make me angry,' said Gabrielle, frowning down a growing inclination to smile. 'They may be so dreadfully frightened at such an apparition that . . .'

'Ah! but how lucky it was merely a surmise! Now suppose that all this time the redoubtable hat was riding quietly home to Kettlebury, on Phil's own head!'

'No thanks to you, I am afraid, in such a case. If we were not already half-way home I should be tempted to turn back.'

'Why not turn back? What can be pleasanter than driving about in good company on a clear starlight night in September? I am in despair at the thought of this pleasant journey being already half over. Do let us turn back.'

'No, if only to cross your wishes I will drive on. Go to sleep again. Miss Tudor and myself are excellent company.'

'Indeed you are! However, I will take your advice and go to sleep again. I was in the most agreeable company when you roused me. There was a young lady in dreamland who talked with your voice, and said such pretty things, Miss Hope, much prettier than you do when I am awake.'

'Very probably—people in dreams say just what one wishes them to say, but people in real life generally do exactly the reverse.'

They drove on for a mile or two, in comparative silence, until a sharp ring of metal on the ground made Gabrielle pull up suddenly. Mr. Bushby sprang out of the carriage, and found that the tire of one of the wheels had become loose, and that it would be impossible to travel any distance in safety. Happily, they were not far from a cottage on the roadside, and Gabrielle, not a little annoyed at this unforeseen dilemma, was forced to acquiesce in Mr. Bushby's suggestion, that they should walk to the cottage, and allow him to follow with the carriage.

The house-mother proved to be a civil, kindly disposed person, who placed chairs for them at her fireside, and sympathised over the catastrophe. The September night was growing chilly, and both Gabrielle and Miss Tudor were glad to take advantage of the proffered hospitality.

In a few minutes Mr. Bushby joined them. 'I am afraid it is a bad business, Miss Hope. The wheel is all to pieces, and there is no blacksmith, I hear, within several miles. We shall either have to walk, or drive home on three wheels.'

'How far are we from home?'

'About three miles; it was really too bad of Adam to allow you to start with a wheel in such a state. The carriage has been laying by for years, and the wood has contracted. The only wonder is that it has not happened before.'

'A thousand pities that it has not!' exclaimed Gabrielle. 'No time could have been more inconvenient than the present. I cannot imagine what we are to do. Cecilia, you will be tired to death. Can we get no conveyance here?—a tax-cart, or even a donkey-cart?'

The woman shook her head. 'We keep nothing of the sort, ma'am, and we have no neighbour within half-a-mile.'

'I fancy I hear the sound of wheels. Mr. Bushby, it may be some one who would take us home. We should not be over-fastidious either as to conveyance or company.'

Mr. Bushby went out, and presently returned with the information that the sound proceeded from a one-horse gig with but one occupant, who professed himself willing to give one of the ladies a seat, as he was passing near Kettlebury Common, and did not object to go half-a-mile out of his way to deposit her at Heatherbrae.

Gabrielle hesitated. She was well aware that Cecilia's strength was unequal to the walk, yet the last thing upon earth that she desired was a moonlight expedition *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Bushby. She felt, however, that no option was left to her. Miss Tudor must drive, at

any cost, and no less certainly must she return to Heatherbrae on foot. Mr. Bushby had already anticipated her answer. He was holding Miss Tudor's cloak in readiness to place it on her shoulders, and entreating her not to keep the 'friend in need' waiting.

'What shall I do, Ella?—it shall be just as you wish,' whispered poor Miss Tudor, feeling herself between the horns of a dilemma. 'Don't you think we could both squeeze in together? I would sit on your lap, or anything.'

'Impossible!' said Gabrielle, half laughing. 'He only offers to take one. Never mind me; I shall be home nearly as soon as you are.'

'I will take care of Miss Hope,' exclaimed Harold, in a seventh heaven of exultation. 'Make haste, please, or the good gentleman will be impatient;' and so saying, he hurried Miss Tudor to the door, and assisted in hoisting her into an elevated seat by the side of a ruddy and benignant grazier, who was returning, happily none the worse for good cheer, from a cattle fair held at a distant town.

The pony and carriage were left in charge of the good man of the house, with orders to take care of the former until Adam Clack should come over in the morning; and then Gabrielle, with a reserve that somewhat checked the flow of her companion's exuberant spirits, started, at her most rapid pace, for Heatherbrae.

'Miss Hope, you must allow me to give you my arm.'

'Thank you, I require no assistance.'

'But at night, and on such a rough road, I cannot let you walk unassisted.'

'I prefer doing so.'

'Then I ask you as a personal favour to allow me to have the pleasure.'

'Then, Mr. Bushby, I must say plainly that I will not.'

Harold hesitated, his ardour somewhat damped. Gabrielle walked on in silence, and seemed indisposed for conversation; but her companion was not so easily to be repressed.

'Miss Hope, are you walking for a wager? By the time you are half-way home you will be perfectly exhausted.'

'No, indeed, I am a capital walker, and I always think we can walk faster by night than by day.'

'Do you grudge me the rare pleasure of walking with you alone?' asked Harold, somewhat piqued.

'I grudge you nothing, Mr. Bushby,' said Gabrielle, lightly, 'though I confess I owe you many a grudge on scores that it would take too long to enumerate.'

'Phil's hat to wit! But how supremely fortunate that I, and not Philip, chanced to be your escort to-night!'

'Mr. Arkwright is very good company. I think he might have proved equal to the occasion.'

'I was thinking of myself, not of you; of my loss, and not of your gain.'

'As Mrs. Melville observes, it is more satisfactory to dwell on our gains than our losses,' said Gabrielle, carelessly.

'And yet dwelling on possible loss may lead one justly to estimate the rapture of possible gain,' said Harold, and his voice sank.

'Possibly,' said Gabrielle, in the most nonchalant of tones. 'For my own part, I think there is often more satisfaction in losing than in winning. I expect Mrs. Melville's ledger, if she had one, would present but a sorry balance-sheet at the year's end.'

'When you talk of losing and winning,' said Harold, in a low voice, 'you talk lightly, from your own point of view. You know nothing of the prize upon which a man would stake his whole existence, and to win or lose which involves more than life or death.'

'I know men are foolish,' said Gabrielle, in the same careless tone, 'and that sometimes they stake, or think they have staked, their happiness upon illusions never likely to be realised. No man of common sense would be guilty of such a folly.'

'Common sense! who talks of common sense?' said Harold. 'Do men sit down and calculate pros and

cons, weigh probabilities, and act accordingly? No, no—to win is life, ecstasy; to lose, despair. They risk their all. Not to risk were despair—worse than despair. To risk and lose all involves no greater doom. Risk all, then, and know the worst; to lose through fear of risk were worst of all.’

‘I know nothing of such things,’ said Gabrielle, quietly. ‘I think I know one thing, however, that Mr. Arkwright’s good taste might have made him a more agreeable companion for an evening walk than all Mr. Bushby’s high-flown gallantry.’

‘Gallantry!’ It was but one word, re-echoed as it fell from her lips, yet it pierced her cruelly. Gabrielle Hope had need of all her self-command that night to conceal from her companion the tumult of emotion that filled her breast; but she did it well. After a short interval of silence, she cast self aside, with all doubts, sorrow, and compunction, and led the conversation into a fresh channel, talking gaily and brilliantly on lighter topics during the remainder of the walk. Harold, half-wounded by her last retort, half-acquiescent in her views of propriety, abandoned the unwelcome subject, resolving to defer it to some more favourable opportunity, and was in ten minutes’ time as lively and entertaining as usual.

It was not until Heatherbrae had been reached, and a torrent of enquiries replied to, and her duties as hostess discharged, that Gabrielle ventured to relax the constraint she had placed upon herself. Then, having seen her guests depart, and wished good-night to those who remained in the house, with a weary step she sought her own room.

CHAPTER XVII.

The setting of a great hope is like the setting of the sun: the brightness of our life is gone.—*Hyperion*.

WITHIN the quiet haven of her own room there was no necessity for maintaining any unreality of demeanour. Already had Aileen's exceeding tenderness of manner and intelligent sympathy won for herself a place in Gabrielle's unspoken confidence.

Surely most persons, at some period of their lives, must have met individuals towards whom they felt strangely and unaccountably drawn. They may have met but for an hour, and then have been swept asunder by the tide of life, never again to meet in this world. Yet that one fleeting hour sufficed to kindle the secret feeling, 'Such an one I could love, and I could trust, if I had the opportunity.' The expression in those eyes was dear to me, though their gaze had never met mine before, and may never meet mine again.'

It may be that between members of different sex this is that mysterious sudden thrill of sympathy known as 'falling in love at first sight.' Between members of the same sex it has never yet received a name. Whether it is in all cases, or in any case, mutual—who can say? Or who can say whether it would outlast the fret of daily life and more intimate acquaintance? Yet, supposing it to be the overflow of some spring of mutual sympathy, we may believe that it would bear the proof of even that most severe test of durability. In the case of Gabrielle and Aileen there was a real, though hidden, tie to give strength and permanence to the sympathetic one.

So that, on this night, when Gabrielle stood by the fire in her dressing-room, with everything arranged for her comfort, and Aileen's soft dark eyes waiting on every look and gesture, she did not hesitate to cast off

all restraint, and, leaning her head upon her hand against the mantelpiece, indulged in a long-drawn sigh.

Aileen, never unmindful of the position she had accepted, volunteered no observation, but silently removed the long cloak which had fallen from Miss Hope's shoulders and lay partly trailing on the ground.

'Thanks, Aileen,' said Gabrielle, wearily, with a vague sense of the soothing influence of Aileen's gentleness. 'I am tired to-night. It has been a tiresome day. At least—not the day—but the walk home. I am so tired!' and, more weary in spirit than in body, she sank into the nearest chair, and allowed Aileen, with her velvet touch, to remove some of her things, and let down the long plaits of bright hair which she was learning to treat so skilfully.

This evening hour in that pleasant room, where all around looked bright and orderly under Aileen's superintendence, had become the happiest hour of Gabrielle's day. She would lean back in delicious idleness, to be caressed by reverential fingers, with no hireling's touch, and sit in dreamy reverie beneath the stroke of the softly wielded brush. With Aileen she could talk or remain silent, according to her mood, and this was in itself no slight indulgence to one who had to play the part of a hostess during the day.

It was almost matter for wonder that such a tranquillity could settle on Gabrielle's ruffled spirit without raising the thought, 'Whence comes this?' But she was content to accept the result without enquiring into the cause. She knew that she was learning to be very fond of her gentle handmaiden; and when the idea occasionally crossed her mind that Aileen's term of service must and ought to be limited, she already put it aside as unwelcome, and admitted to herself that what she would lose with Aileen would certainly never be replaced.

'This world is full of wrong, Aileen,' she observed, presently, gazing dreamily at the firelight; 'full of

deceits and hypocrisies, so that those who would be true cannot, and those who seem most true are but acting a lie.'

The brush fell from Aileen's hands, and in stooping to pick it up her answer was unheard.

'Do you think we shall be punished hereafter for the faults that through our parents' sin we may have been led to commit?'

With white and trembling lips Aileen murmured that she could not tell.

'Supposing, Aileen—now listen, for I am going to put a case to you—supposing you were some day to find out that I was not exactly what I seem to be, that I was deceiving you and everybody—that, unwillingly, I was daily, hourly, acting an untruth, and that this untruth occasionally produced sorrow and disappointment; in such a case, what should you think of me?'

Aileen hesitated—her confession trembled on her tongue. Yet who could have told? How could Miss Hope have found out? And, oh! what would be the result of discovery? Not yet, not yet; at any price let the secret remain undiscovered until by tender care and unceasing effort she had won for herself a love that would make the announcement acceptable. Yet surely Gabrielle must guess! Surely she must be trying her, testing her! Something must have occurred to awaken her suspicions, and she was taking this mode of setting her mind at rest.

'I cannot tell,' she faltered, at length. 'I hope I should not judge you harshly. I do not think I should. Circumstances are hard upon some persons, and though they wish to do right, the right time for doing it may not appear to be come; and I think—I hope—God will forgive if the motive is good.'

'Oh, Aileen!' exclaimed Gabrielle, 'how wise you are in your simplicity! You have said just what the only adviser I have in the world has said to me, and it calmed me for a time, until new entanglements arose, and with them the old frantic desire to be truthful and open.'

Aileen drew a long breath. Her secret was still her own.

'It is most true,' continued Gabrielle, 'that the sins of the parent are visited upon the child. If that were all, the child must suffer in silence, and not repine over the will of God in this matter. But it seems hard when this self-same sin brings disappointment and anguish upon others who neither inherit nor deserve it.'

'I have no right to ask questions or make remarks,' said Aileen, humbly, 'yet it seems to me impossible that one so happy and prosperous can be suffering for a parent's sin.'

'Are you so simple, Aileen, as to judge of every one's happiness from their appearance of outward prosperity? I have more than my share of this world's goods, yet I often have an aching heart.'

'I did not think that wealth made happiness,' said Aileen, 'but with wisdom and goodness, and many friends, I fancy such a lot could not be a very hard one.'

'Many friends,' repeated Gabrielle, thoughtfully. 'Some friends I have, certainly; but you will be surprised, Aileen, to hear that, rich and prosperous as I seem to be, I have scarcely a blood relation in the wide world.'

Once more the brush slipped through Aileen's awkward fingers, and once more she stooped, half suffocated with agitation, to pick it up.

'I dare say you are astonished. People think, because I am well-born and wealthy, I must have friends and relations to order. But these ties are not to be bought for money. Wise men say that lots are more equal in this world than superficial observers imagine. I don't know how true this may be, but I know that I have often envied large, scrambling families, where mouths are many and means are short. They always seem so warmly attached to one another, so full of self-sacrifice, so independent of public opinion. I think it must be very pleasant to belong to a large family.'

'I think so too,' said Aileen; 'love must make up for a great many deficiencies.'

‘However outwardly smooth and gay a life may be, continued Gabrielle, ‘I believe in the truth of the old saying that there is always a skeleton in one cupboard. And I believe the true secret of the horror it inspires often consists in the fact of its being kept in the cupboard. If we could but open the cupboard doors, the hideous apparition would after a while crumble into dust. But, ah! with some of us the cupboard is locked, and double locked, and the key out of our own keeping.’

‘Doors can be broken open,’ said Aileen, dropping a vague suggestion, as one groping in the dark.

‘The keeper of the key may have a right—and what then? Or the cupboard may have been locked by one since dead, with instructions not to be unlocked. In either case submission is the only alternative. But, oh! it is much better to be a man than a woman, Aileen.’

‘Is it?’ said Aileen, startled by the suddenness of the observation. ‘I never thought of being a man. I never could have been a man unless I had not been myself.’

‘I believe that is true,’ said Gabrielle, smiling. ‘But I should like to have been a man. Men can act, but women can only endure. Which would you prefer, dashing into the midst of the battle, sword in hand, to die giving and receiving innumerable wounds, or standing up to be shot at, with no attainable virtue but the drawing of your last breath without a betrayal of your agony?’

‘But need I stand up and wait for the shot? Might it not come while I was binding the wounds of those who were dying around me?’

Gabrielle paused and considered. ‘Yes, there is again wisdom in your simplicity, Aileen. There is truth in what you say. When I came to Heatherbrae I thought I should find wounds to bind, and so the pain and suspense would be forgotten; but somehow my old life seems to have followed me and clung to me, and in some ways my vexations here are even greater than

they were before. I wonder if one ever gets away from a former life ?'

'Not if the life is a part of our being, and made by ourselves, I suppose. If it is only an external life, I fancy it must be possible to leave it behind, and mark out a new one.'

'If so, a new one may still be mine. The life I dislike is no part of me, though it follows and clings to me. Perhaps ere long I may have an opportunity of remodelling it, and endeavouring to make it less useless than it has hitherto been.'

'When you were speaking of binding up wounds,' said Aileen, 'I fancied you had forgotten some wounds you had bound up since you came here. You have some fruit to show for your life here already.'

'Perhaps so—I hope so, Aileen. Remember, you have promised some day to tell me your story, and how you came to have thoughts beyond your years.'

'Some day,' faltered Aileen. 'Some day, when you know me better—when you have no visitors at Heatherbrae, and when my own fearfulness has passed away. Some day, when the house is very, very quiet, and you are sorrowful and unhappy, and need to hear the tale of a sadder life than your own to make you take comfort.'

'Poor child ! Perhaps when that day comes we may exchange a mutual confidence. Every life is worth the telling to those who think and reason. There ought to be a certain sympathy between us, for if I am alone in the world, you can be no less so, or you would not be with me now.'

'I am lonely,' said Aileen, in a low voice, 'as lonely as you are—just the same.'

It taxed Gabrielle's utmost ingenuity to avoid being left alone with Mr. Bushby the following and several succeeding days, and the endeavour to avoid such situations deprived her of most of her wonted enjoyments. The garden, where she was in the habit of spending the first hour after breakfast, was pre-eminently dangerous ; and although she extorted from Cecilia a promise not

to leave her there alone, she could not venture to rely much on this security; for, in truth, Miss Tudor's absence of self-assertion, and desire to be ignored, had reduced her to the mere phantom of a chaperone—a figment not likely to oppose a barrier to such impetuosity as that of Harold Bushby.

With a view to obtaining a temporary release from this most wearisome coercion of her movements, Gabrielle proposed an excursion to a somewhat distant town, where a minster of great beauty drew numbers of tourists from the neighbourhood. Having made arrangements for the transmission of the whole party, she did not announce, until they were on the point of starting, that it was not her intention to accompany them. This discovery occasioned no slight dissatisfaction, and it was with difficulty that she persuaded some of her too officious friends to depart without her.

Miss Hope was happy in possessing that amiable decision of character and of manner which enables a lady to carry her point without having recourse to rudeness, or laying herself open to the charge of obstinacy. The two carriages drove off with no further remonstrance than was conveyed in Cecilia's expression of mute resignation, and Harold Bushby's ludicrous gestures of despair.

With the feeling of a released captive, the mistress of Heatherbrae sought her garden, and revelled in her liberty; revelled in her dahlias and asters, her fuschias, and lingering geraniums. The garden, with its quaint fringe of pine-trees, was secluded enough for enjoyment, though open to the joyous sunshine and to every fitful breeze that swept across the moor. From her terrace-walks Gabrielle could see the far-off hills, blue with the soft haze of the atmosphere, and her gaze seldom sought their outline without the unbidden association arising in her mind, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.' Many a breast less guileless than that of the royal shepherd, and less world-stained than that of the modern bard, has experienced, without the power of expressing, the noble sentiment that 'high mountains are a feeling.' The hills are truly interwoven

with our lives—a part of ourselves. The valleys may be well enough for working days—days of toil and care, money-getting, and money-losing; but it is on ‘the mountain summit, dark and high,’ that we find the grateful, Sabbath-like tranquillity that settles on our souls, lifting them into a purer region, and leaving them restored and refreshed by their communing with the high, the holy, and the Unseen.

Gabrielle’s spirit felt marvellously refreshed after she had strolled about in solitude for an hour or more. At the expiration of that time, having letters to write, she returned to the house. And thus ‘busily idle, calmly gay,’ the hours wore on, and the afternoon was already somewhat advanced, when a low tap at the door heralded the first invasion of her highly-prized solitude. She hoped it might prove to be Aileen, returned from a walk, which she had taken upon the recommendation of her mistress, and anxious for work for her needle. But in answer to her cordial ‘Come in!’ a mass of chestnut curls and a merry, deprecating face caused a sudden chill to run through her veins, as she felt that for once she was absolutely caught in a trap of her own contriving.

‘You must surely be aware, Mr. Bushby, that I am “not at home,”’ she observed, with a coldness that was by no means assumed. ‘The possibility of any one not of my household intruding on my privacy never crossed my imagination. I believed there was an etiquette in these matters which men of the world, like you and your friends, would never think of disregarding.’

‘I know that I am offending against every rule of etiquette and propriety,’ said Harold, closing the door, while the agitation of his voice and general demeanour proved that he was not insensible to the severity of the rebuke he had received, though impelled by an uncontrollable impulse to brave it. ‘There are cases in which the mere conventional virtue of propriety must yield to the overwhelming force of the heart and its necessities. You have repelled me, Miss Hope, but I will not be repelled. You have thwarted all my attempts to obtain an interview in an orthodox manner, and you have com-

pelled me to seek it, against my better judgment, in a manner that is displeasing to you, and that offends against the dictates of good taste.'

'Well, Mr. Bushby,' said Gabrielle, who had recovered her self-possession, 'since you have obtained your desire by illicit means, I cannot refuse you a seat at my fireside, though it is but fair to you to protest against the discussion of any subject on which we know our views to be at variance. There are numerous points on which we agree, and on which I shall be happy to have half-an-hour of friendly conversation.'

'Why would you keep me from knowing my fate?' asked Harold, in tones of such undisguised wretchedness that they went to the heart of his listener; while, as he knelt at her side, and rested his arm on the table at which she was writing, she could hear the impetuous throbbing of his heart, which almost impeded his utterance.

'Because I would be to you a sister,' said Gabrielle, with a gentle gravity, and a look of such tender pity that, as she laid her hand on his arm, the tears sprang into the usually merry, laughing eyes that were just now pouring upon her their whole wealth of love and admiration. 'I would warn you not to seek for that which you can never obtain, and I would spare you the pain and mortification you seem bent upon pursuing.'

'You warn me too late,' he exclaimed, in a tone of deep feeling. 'I have already staked my all—yes, my all—and I will win all, or lose all. There are not two Gabrielle Hopes.'

'Oh, Mr. Bushby!' said Gabrielle, with an inflection of voice so sad that it ought to have carried conviction to the mind of her listener, 'you desire that which can never, never be. Surely I have never by word or look led you to contemplate such a possibility! God is my witness that I have striven to avert such a misfortune by every means in my power. I have seen you fluttering round ladies in town—making merry with them as you have since done with me—and I never imagined until Wednesday last, that your attentions to me had any deeper

significance than your attentions to them. Since Wednesday I have tried to make you understand, but you would not understand; you would not spare yourself—you would not open your eyes to the truth.'

'Did you know yourself so little as to believe that I, or any one, could flutter around you for any length of time without learning to love you more truly, more passionately, than all in the world beside? Your coldness only drew me towards you more and more, for I did not mistake you for one of those who are to be wooed and won in a day. Love you I must while life lasts, for I never knew what love was till I knew you. If you send me from you, I can never, never love again; for never can I meet with another who can be to me what you have been.'

'You ask an impossibility.'

'But why?—oh! forgive the question!—is there any reason, any prior attachment, any barrier, to make this a thing impossible? I have no right to ask but the right which a love like mine may give—a love that cannot, will not, be lightly put aside.'

Gabrielle had rested her elbows on the table, and her face was hidden by her hands. Such a question, prompted by such a love, deserved an answer—but what answer? Several, equally truthful, equally decisive, passed rapidly through her mind. Such an emergency might justify her in bestowing a confidence not otherwise to be given. Yet this course presented embarrassments which might involve future remorse. For some moments she debated the point in silence, while Harold knelt by her side, scarcely breathing in the intensity of his expectation. Then having decided upon adopting the course that involved most of present pain, but least of future suffering, she replied sadly—

'The simplest reason is the best for us both, and it is the truth—I do not love you. No other reasons can carry any weight, in comparison with this. I feel a warm friendship for you, but no love.'

And then the expectant face dropped on the outspread arms, and there was no reply.

In this world of sorrow and difficulty is there any office more hopeless than the task of consoling one whom you have just rejected? Friends may urge fortitude and renewed action upon the unsuccessful in business, relatives may breathe hope and resignation into the ear of the bereaved, but what species of solace can a maiden offer to the lover whose prayer she has just denied? Let her assure him that never more will she cross his path in life—what blank despair! Or, that, on the contrary, they may still hope to meet in friendly intercourse—oh! still more grievous desolation! Let her bid him remember her with kindness—oh! cruel suggestion! Or forget her utterly—ah! heartless mockery of words in that first bitter hour!

In sorrow and in silence, Gabrielle pondered over such thoughts as these. She deeply grieved over the anguish she had inflicted. Even while her conscience acquitted her of blame, a vague feeling of self-reproach tormented her. Might she not have averted this stroke? Might it not have been possible to forestall the declaration? Now that the ship had sunk, a hundred ways of saving her occurred to the imagination. But, alas! had it ever been possible, it was now too late, and there was nothing left but to strive to render such sorry comfort as sympathy might suggest. And Gabrielle, because she could not bear to do nothing, proceeded to do the little that lay in her power.

‘Put away the useless dream. Life is too precious to be wasted over an ideal—and it was but an ideal that you loved in me. It may console you now to know that we are utterly and entirely unsuited in tastes and disposition. You love society, you are formed for society, while I love best a country life and the monotonous round of country pleasures. Such a life would weary you in a week.’

‘Never—never with you.’

‘Yes, indeed, even with me. No life can be otherwise than irksome where tastes are dissimilar and sympathy wanting. Married life is made up of sober hours, and

unless there is a harmony in tastes and disposition, it is only a bitter thralldom that grows heavier and heavier with the lapse of time.'

'You have looked upon me as a butterfly—a drone—and you never knew that there was in me a depth of affection and earnestness that only you could call into existence.'

'I may have called them into existence, but I could not have kept them alive. This office is reserved for some one else.'

'For no one else! O Miss Hope! I may marry, but, remember—I shall never, never love again as I have loved you—the very touch of your hand—the very sound of your voice—the very words that tell me that you, alas! have no love for me!'

'Be sure I shall never remember against you a speech so destitute of trust in the future. Who knows the joy or the sorrow that may be in store for him? None of us, thank God! The time may come when the intensity of your love for another will teach you to look back upon this as a youthful fancy. When that time does come, be sure I shall remember nothing but that you loved me very truly, and that Providence has been gracious in giving you another whom you could love still better.'

'And is there no hope for me—none—either now, or in coming years?'

'None,' said Gabrielle, gravely—'none from me, but a whole lifetime of hope and promise elsewhere.'

'It is too soon to think of that now—if ever,' said Harold, sadly. 'I never loved before, and at present I feel as though I should never love again. Farewell! I have learned nothing but good from you, though it seems to me I was happier before I knew how good and pure and loveable a woman might be. Having known you, I shall be unable to content myself with those who contented me before. But I will not weary you—may God for ever bless and protect you, and may you some day experience all the happiness that I foolishly thought was to be mine!'

As he spoke he took both her hands within his, and kissed them with a distant reverence, and a profound tenderness that was indescribably affecting. Gabrielle never dreamed of withdrawing from that caress. Her dignity was in no way offended by it. It seemed but the fitting conclusion to a scene so fraught with pain to both. It said 'Farewell' with a pathos deeper than the spoken word. It told of all that he was resigning, and of what he would have been to her had she willed otherwise. It said all this, but it said no more.

Gabrielle spoke no word, though the tears that stood in her eyes bore witness to all that she was feeling. But when she had met his last lingering look as he left the room, and had heard the door close behind him, and knew that she was indeed alone, she sank upon her knees, and having prayed for him in his pain and desolation, she thanked God for having spared her the great anguish of loving Harold Bushby.

CHAPTER XVIII.

How sweet, how passing sweet is solitude !
But grant me still a friend in my retreat.
Whom I may whisper—' Solitude is sweet.'

Cowper.

TO NONE of her household or guests did Gabrielle speak of what had passed between Mr. Bushby and herself. His sudden departure, however, gave rise to conjectures, and Emma ventured to rally her cousin upon what she called the suspiciousness of the circumstances; but Gabrielle's undisguised displeasure at the liberty taken, and at the want of decorum it betrayed, silenced Emma at home, if it did not do so abroad.

The loss of Mr. Bushby tended to unsettle the whole party. In truth, the Colonel, weary of ruralising, and pining for his club and his town occupations, was glad

of an excuse for returning to a more congenial sphere, and Mr. Bushby's comrades without their chief were but a dismal pair.

Gabrielle could part with her guests without much chagrin, for their arrival had interfered with many of her plans for usefulness, and had deprived her of the solitude she had come to Heatherbrae to find.

But she was startled and disconcerted when Cecilia, with much doubt and hesitation, told her that she had for some time been fearing that her presence in town would be necessary for a time, owing to some complications arising out of the wording of her sister's will.

'I have been so distressed and unhappy, Ella, ever since I heard from my lawyer upon the subject. I feared I should disarrange your plans, and the very thought of a journey to town, without an escort, filled me with alarm. Now, you see, I could return under the care of Colonel Mostyn, but then it appears to me impossible to leave you here unprotected.'

'I am very sorry indeed that you should have occasion to go,' said Gabrielle, 'for your own sake as much as for mine. I daresay I shall feel dull while you are away, but I don't know that my being left alone matters much, with Adam and Molly to guard me, and Aileen to care for me.'

'Oh ! but it does matter, dear Ella. I know very well it is not the proper thing, and I can't imagine what Mr. and Mrs. Pierrepont will think of me ; but what can I do ? If I were to postpone it for a month it would be as bad for you, and I should have to travel alone, and I am such a poor, foolish, nervous creature, that I don't know what would become of me.'

'You had far better go with Uncle Henry and Emma,' said Gabrielle, kissing her. 'I am very sorry, but I see there is no help for it, and as to your travelling alone, that is out of the question.'

'You won't think that I don't like Kettlebury,' said Cecilia, anxiously, 'and Molly and Adam, and everything else. I am sure they are such good, simple-minded

people, that I am getting quite attached to them, and I shall be so glad to come back again.'

'We shall be equally glad to welcome you back. If you don't come back soon, I shall send Adam to escort you. Meanwhile I shall try to learn something of my people, and take long walks over the purple heath. Do not be anxious about me, Cecilia. I never could feel unhappy at Heatherbrae.'

Nevertheless when all her friends were gone, and she walked alone through the silent rooms and solitary garden, a feeling more akin to dulness than she had imagined possible began, after a time, to creep over her. At first the sense of freedom from restraint was exquisite; but when the novelty had worn off, and still the solitariness continued—when she had sat down to meal after meal with no companion to speak to, and no interruption save the quiet footstep of the servant, the stillness began to grow irksome to one so much used to society and social life, and she learned to look forward eagerly to the morning and evening hours in her own room, and to Aileen's refined and congenial companionship.

After a week of solitude, Gabrielle entered Aileen's room one day unexpectedly, and found the slight figure, in its mourning garb, bending a white face over some of the gifts Gabrielle was preparing for a Christmas-tree.

'I am afraid you are tiring yourself, Aileen. Do you never grow weary of sitting alone over your work for so many hours every day?'

'No,' said Aileen, looking up, with her sweet, thoughtful smile. 'I have never felt weary of anything since I came to Heatherbrae;' and she rose to place a chair for her young mistress. 'I have so much to make my life pleasant, and then I have the evening to look forward to,' she added, while a faint colour tinged her cheek.

'The evening! Do you look forward to the evening—to my coming, do you mean?'

'Yes, I look forward to the evening all through the day. I have nothing to wish for while I am brushing your hair.'

'Poor little Aileen!' said Gabrielle, much moved; and passing behind her chair, she gently stroked her dark hair. 'I wonder what makes you care so much for me, Aileen.'

Could Gabrielle have felt Aileen's pulses at that moment, how would she have marvelled!

'You have been so good to me,' faltered Aileen, presently. 'You are my only friend in the great wide world.'

'Poor little friendless one! Never mind; sometimes one friend is better than a thousand. And I am your friend; not through compassion alone, but because I have learned to love you. I hope I may always have it in my power to take care of you. Will it surprise you, Aileen, if I say that I have also learned to look forward to the evening?'

'Is that possible?' asked Aileen, with kindling eyes, and a thrill of joy.

'Quite possible—quite true! And now I came to tell you that while I am by myself, it is my wish that you should be my companion below as well as my attendant above. Shall you like this?'

Aileen's pale cheek flushed with excitement. 'I had not thought of such a thing.'

'Think of it now then. It is my wish. I have not known you thus long without discovering that you are more at home in a parlour than anywhere else.'

'My father was well-born,' murmured Aileen. 'He was a gentleman, and moved in high society. My mother was a governess, but I think, nay, I am sure, quite sure, that my mother was a lady.'

'I am sure of it too,' said Gabrielle, kindly. 'Now gather up your work, and come downstairs with me, and I will talk to you about some of my plans.'

In the drawing-room, by the cheerful hearth, the young mistress and her protégé sat over their work, and Gabrielle's loneliness gave place to genial and sociable hours.

Day after day, when she left her bedroom to descend to the solitary breakfast-table, she would go into the

little room next her own, and invite Aileen to be her companion; and although Aileen flitted off like a spirit whenever strangers appeared at Heatherbrae, yet she would soon return again to her quiet corner in the sitting-room. Ere long Gabrielle began to feel that the chief charm of her moorland life consisted in the unobtrusive affection of her companion, and in the mysterious sense of attraction which she had never before experienced towards any one.

'Aileen,' said Gabrielle, one day, after some weeks had been passed in this manner, 'I sometimes ask myself whether it is possible that a few months ago I had never even heard of you. How have you contrived to make yourself so completely a part of my life here in this short time?'

'Have I done so?' asked Aileen. 'I suppose the love and respect I felt for you from the very beginning have made you feel differently towards me from what you would have felt towards most strangers. I don't think time has necessarily much to do with affection or friendship.'

'I think it was your utter friendlessness that made me feel all at once as if you belonged to me,' said Gabrielle. 'If you had had even one relation in the world, it would have made all the difference. They might have come and claimed you. But now I know that my interests are yours, and I suppose we are all more or less selfish in our friendships.'

'I have no one to draw my affections off from you,' said Aileen, softly.

'I, too, have few friends,' said Gabrielle, 'and I may say no relatives—at least none towards whom I feel as I fancy people must feel towards near relations; none who would not think it very tiresome to have to put on mourning if I died, or whose grief for me would supersede their interest in my will.'

Aileen gazed at the fire and made no reply.

'Do you remember,' said Gabrielle, after a pause, 'that I one day said when you knew me better you should tell me the story of your life? And I think I

also said that I would tell you what there was to tell of mine. We have a long evening before us to-night, and I am going to give you a proof of my confidence by telling you my past history. It seems to me that I have nearly reached a kind of crisis in my life; and if you are going to remain with me, and be my sole companion for, perhaps, many months, it will be better for both of us that you should know what is known but to one other person; and I feel sure that I can trust you not less fully than I can trust myself.'

Aileen returned the pressure of the kind hand that had taken hers, but the face that she uplifted was white as death, for she knew not what she might be about to hear, or what confidences might be expected from her in return.

'I daresay I have told you before that I never recollect any brothers or sisters,' began Gabrielle. 'I have been told that I had two brothers, but they died so early that I am unable to remember them, and my mother also died while I was still an infant. For some years afterwards I lived with my grandfather, at whose house my mother died. This grandfather was the Mr. Erskine whose name you may have heard mentioned in connection with this place. He did not reside at Heatherbrae in those days, though even then the property belonged to him, and he had planted it in anticipation of the house he intended to build. He lived in a country house far away from this, and with him and my careful nurse I spent a very happy childhood. When I was nine years old, however, my father seems to have thought that I required increased advantages and a mother's care. So I was taken away from my grandfather to the aunt, Mrs. Pierrepont, with whom I have since lived. Oh! well do I remember the misery of those early days! My nurse had been dismissed because she was not a grand dame enough for Grosvenor Square. I was entirely amongst strangers. No one in that house understood a young child. They thought if they plied me with new toys and sweetmeats I should forget all about my grandfather and nurse, and my happy

country home. So they took me about to see new sights, and invited other little boys and girls to come and play with me, and forbade me to talk or think about the home and the friends from whom I had been taken away.

‘Well, I ceased to cry after a time, though I did not cease to remember. I grew up with a double life, as it were. A cold, gay, bright life that everyone saw, and a silent, tearful life seen by none,—which I lived in my quiet bed, in the sober hours at Church, and over my morning and evening prayers. So life passed on. I had nothing to love but the memory of the past, and over my country life and my country friends all my good and true feelings seemed to be continually brooding. My uncle and aunt were very kind to me, but they had no connection with the silent life, but belonged to the cold, gay one which was the only one they saw.

‘Time passed on, and although I saw a great deal of company, I was not yet formally introduced into society. One day there came a letter from my father, written from Heidelberg, saying that he wished to see me, and that he had made arrangements for my joining him there at once.

‘To Heidelberg I went, and there, whilst I was living under my father’s guardianship, I became acquainted with Frank Kearney.

‘I should like to draw a veil over those three months, the most eventful three months of my life; and this, not because they were unhappy; on the contrary, they were the happiest, the sunniest days I had ever known, brighter too than any that have succeeded them. But I have since learned, with grief and shame, that my meeting with Frank Kearney at that time was not accidental, and that he, equally with myself, was a victim to a scheme carefully laid down beforehand. My father—and God forbid that I should ever speak of him but in a tender and dutiful manner!—was at that time sorely embarrassed. My mother’s fortune had been settled upon me, and he had no power over it. His own patrimony, which had been an ample one, was spent

and gone, no one knew how, nor was it known from whence the finances came upon which he was at this time living. He was also overwhelmed with debt. At this very period, reading with a tutor at Heidelberg, was the Frank Kearney whom I have already named. His father and my father had had some slight acquaintance in former days, but his father was now dead; he had long been without a mother, and his two sisters, the only near relatives he had, were considerably older than himself, both married and settled in England. Mr. Kearney had been a banker, and his great wealth descended principally to his son. My father knew this. He thought (may God pardon him!) that this wealthy youth would be a desirable husband for his daughter, and that if he could bring about a marriage between the two, he might look forward confidently to a time when he should be able to clear off his debts, and enjoy ease and affluence for the rest of his life. Accordingly he sent for me, and like an inexperienced, unsuspicious child as I was (for I was only sixteen years of age), I fell willingly and at once into the trap spread for me.

‘I cannot wonder that I did so, even after this interval of time. My life at Heidelberg was very lonely. If my father took me out with him he was no companion for a young girl just verging on womanhood, but far more frequently I was left to the charge of the woman of the house where we lodged, a respectable middle-aged person, from whom I learnt nothing that I should not have learnt, but who was no more of a companion to me than the parasol I used to hold in my hand. One evening Frank Kearney dined with us by invitation. He was very handsome, very intelligent, very tender and respectful in his manner to women. Moreover, he was true-hearted and high-principled to a degree. I shall never forget how the cold and frozen-up pulses of my heart seemed to thaw and expand at once under the influence of his genial nature. He drew me out of myself, he led me to talk of my life, of my hopes and thoughts and feelings. They all seemed to interest him. He told me of his own schemes for the future, of his

own view of life, and the object of life. When my father went into the garden of the castle after dinner, to walk up and down and enjoy his pipe, we sat near on some broken fragments of the ruins, and exchanged opinions as if we had been friends from childhood. This was but the first of many and many a delightful meeting. Everywhere I met Frank Kearney. From this time forward my father seemed to have no better occupation in life than to ramble with me by the banks of the Neckar, or over the ruins of the fine old castle. As soon as we met Frank, as we invariably did meet him, my father used to say that, as I had a younger and more congenial companion, he would amuse himself with a book, and that when we were tired of rambling about and gathering botanical treasures, we should know where to find him.

Thus, Aileen, the silent life I had so long been leading ceased to be silent, and for that one bright spring-tide the gay, cold, glittering life melted away into a warm, true, and sympathetic one. I had found an ear that would listen to all my hitherto hidden thoughts, an eye that told me they were not mine alone, and a simple-hearted wisdom that shewed me where they were wrong, and why they were not right. The time for my return to England drew near, and my heart used to die away within me when I thought of passing out of the sunshine into the cold shade of my former life. It was not, however, my father's purpose to keep me with him, and it was too apparent to me that I was a burthen and an expense for me to request that I might remain with him always. To Frank I never spoke of parting, and if he alluded to it, it was always with the confident assurance that we should certainly meet again, and that before long. And now, I do not know exactly what transpired between Frank Kearney and my father. To this day it is a mystery to me. I only know, to my everlasting shame, that that noble nature was taken advantage of for the meanest ends, and that I must have been made to appear to be a party to what in my maturer years I look back upon with shame and disgust.

‘The evening before I was to start for England I was sitting alone in our parlour, when Frank Kearney entered the room. He came up to me and took my hands into his and said, “We have had a happy time together, Gabrielle—I can scarcely believe it is over. Shall you go away and forget me as if we had never met?” My heart was very full, and although I managed to speak composedly, I fear he must have seen that there were tears in my eyes. I said “No, I shall not forget you. I shall think of you often.”

“Shall you do more than think of me?” he asked. “Shall you love me as I shall love you?”

‘I said “Yes”: it was the truth, how could I help saying it? It was not in my heart to coquette with him. He asked a simple question, and I answered it truly.

“Then, Gabrielle,” he said, “before we part, will you give me a pledge that you love me? Will you give me something to keep for your sake?”

‘I took from my neck a little gold cross of my mother’s, which I always wore, and put it in his hand, and he gave me a locket with his own hair in it, which I was to keep always for his sake.

‘At this moment my father entered the room. He came to the window where we were standing—my hand was in Frank’s—the keepsakes in our other hands. My father put his hand upon our joined hands. “Thank God,” he said, “that your own hearts should have led you to a decision which I cannot but approve. Yet, remember, you are both young—the world is alluring, and how shall a piece of gold bind you together when all the influences of the world will tend to tear you asunder? Have you no better pledge to give to each other than the exchange of two paltry keepsakes? nothing on which your hearts can rest with confidence when the sea rolls between you, and month after month passes away without any assurance that your hearts are unchanged? You are too young to take upon yourselves the indissoluble vows that may be yours hereafter, but surely a vow taken in God’s sight is as binding as a vow taken before the altar in the presence of a priest. On such a pledge your

hearts might rest securely, and the world would have no power to separate you, and you yourselves would never be tempted to distrust an affection that had been pledged with all but the solemnity of a marriage vow."

"I know not what feelings influenced Frank at that moment. Whether he was carried away by the dread of the interval that must elapse before he could claim me, and overpowered by the impulse to pledge me to himself for ever, I cannot say—I only know that he clasped my hand still more tightly in his, and exclaimed, "I swear, as in God's sight, Gabrielle, that you and none other shall ever be my wife: will you say the same to me?"

"Yes," I said, falteringly; "I swear that I will never be any one's wife but yours, if we both live."

"Then he bent forward and kissed me, and I remember my father blessed us both, and desired me to bid adieu to Frank, and retire to rest, as I had to start early the next morning, and he himself wished to have a little conversation alone with Frank.

"I cannot account for our not meeting the next morning, but we did not meet, and I have never seen Frank Kearney since. It had been arranged for me to start early, but I do not think Frank had been told how early, for I was myself taken by surprise when I was roused at four o'clock the next morning, and hurried off without breakfast, with the promise that we should have some breakfast at the first resting-place on the journey. As I passed through the sitting-room where we had spent the previous evening, I saw my album lying on the little table in the window, where it usually stood, and where we had often looked at it together. I caught it up and thrust it into my travelling-bag, and did not open it until we were on the Rhine, far, far from Frank Kearney and Heidelberg. When I did open it, the first thing that caught my eye was some lines in his handwriting, which must have been inscribed there before he left the previous evening, and which came to me as his parting injunction:—

Belovéd, let us love so well
Our work shall still be sweeter for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work.'

Gabrielle paused, and Aileen in silence pressed her white face upon the hand that enclosed hers.

'Now, Aileen, I must leave you to imagine how this secret has weighed upon my spirit, and quenched any joy or brightness there might otherwise have been in my life. At first the remembrance of that time spent together prevented me from feeling the weight of the chain with which I had been fettered by my own father; but circumstances made known to me the motive that had prompted his course of action, and then I saw that that mutual pledge was not merely the result of Frank Kearney's impulsive nature, and overflowing love for me, but was rather part of a deep-laid scheme, in which I had been made an accomplice, for making one so pure and noble-hearted as Frank Kearney, swear away his liberty before he was of an age to know what would be for his benefit or happiness in such a sacred matter. My father told me, as we journeyed to England, that he had made Frank promise not to claim the fulfilment of my pledge until I was of age, and that he had also forbidden any systematic correspondence. No wonder: he dreaded lest my uncle and aunt should discover for what purpose he had sent for me to Heidelberg, and he thought, if the matter could be hushed up for five years, circumstances would probably clear the way for the fulfilment of the pledge. He little knew that in five years' time he himself would be the only one removed from the scene, and that the chain with which he bound us would have been for years dragging us down to earth with its leaden weight.'

'But are you sure that Mr. Kearney wishes to be released from his part of the pledge?'

'He is too noble ever to have said so, but how can we doubt it? If I, a weak woman, chafe and fret beneath it, how much more must a high-spirited man do so? And O, Aileen! bitterest thought of all, how can he help thinking that I was in league with my own father

to entrap him unwarily into the snare? He knows, what I know, that my father died deeply in debt, a ruined and despairing man; but he does not know, what I know, that at the time that pledge was given I was ignorant whether my father was rich or poor, or whether he himself was wealthy or a beggar. Even this newly acquired wealth increased my difficulties, for if now I endeavour to set aside this oath, taken under a kind of compulsion—and I am fully resolved so to do—may not he think that I desired his wealth and position formerly, but that, now I have obtained both by other means, I am willing to cast him off without a regret?’

‘But why cast him off? He may be all you could desire. He may feel for you still the affection he felt five years ago.’

‘A passing boyish dream, Aileen, such as every boy feels over and over again before he meets with *the* one who is to be all in all to him! I do not wish to marry. No. I am content to live and die single and solitary. Only let him be free! To have blighted his life; to have forced myself on a passive victim, not to say an unwilling husband; to be endured for his oath’s sake, but not to be the free choice of his riper and maturer years,—who would submit to such a lot? He never now could choose me because his heart yearned towards me, because his judgment approved me, because his eye rested upon me with delight, and my presence was necessary to his happiness. No. The past has left no room for the play of such feelings between him and me. He regards me as his doom, his fate; a fate he will submit to because he is a high-principled man, but a fate that settled itself upon him, not one that he went forth to seek gladly and rejoicingly. Such a fate I will never be to him. He shall be free if the wisest opinions in the land can persuade him that he is free; and if they cannot persuade me in my innermost consciousness that I am free likewise, yet they may leave me to spend my life in such quiet and retirement as best suits my taste, and cannot force me to burthen another with the burthen of a self-inflicted wife.’

'Surely not self-inflicted,' Aileen ventured to remonstrate.

'Yes, self-inflicted, at least my father and myself must in his eyes count as one. But for that miserable pledge he would have gone away and forgotten the little girl he used to play with at Heidelberg in his boyhood. In less than a twelvemonth my very name would have escaped his memory; that name, which now for five years must have sounded in his ears with all the mysterious horror of a nightmare.'

There was a silence for some minutes, and then Gabrielle said, 'We will talk no more to-night. You now know more about me, Aileen, than any one living. I shall not speak on the subject again, and should I never reopen it, you have only to forget that you ever heard it.'

'Are you sorry you told me?' asked Aileen, anxiously.

'No, for I had begun to feel it necessary to tell some one, and I would rather have told you than any one else. Besides, circumstances might make it desirable you should know the truth. I shall be of age in the early spring, and he might arrive at any time—possibly during my absence from home. Or I might die; but should any of these things occur, I believe I could rely upon your judgment.'

Aileen only bent her head in reply.

'Another night you shall tell me something about yourself,—as much or as little as you like. You would not be afraid to give me your confidence now, should you?'

'Afraid only,' faltered Aileen, 'because my life has been so unlike yours. The story of my life might make you love me less, not more.'

'I think, Aileen, you are wanting in faith in your friends. I have often observed this doubting spirit in you. Do you not know that "perfect love casteth out fear"? If you love me so well, why should you doubt me?'

'I love you so well that I dare not risk the possi-

bility of losing your love. I have but one friend, and if I lose that one friend I am as desolate as I was when you first came to me and saved me from—I know not what.'

'But, poor child, you always speak as if you had done something very wicked, the knowledge of which would make me shrink from you.'

'Wicked! O no! I have done nothing that I think you would blame me for; but there may be circumstances in my life that would distress you. We cannot control circumstances.'

'No, and therefore I think you need not fear to make them known to me. However, I will not press you. I will not even ask you again. Some day, perhaps, you will feel a wish to unburthen yourself, as I have felt to-night, and then, and not till then, you shall do so.'

Aileen raised a grateful look towards the kind face that bent over her, and acquiesced thankfully in this decision. She scarcely knew whether or not the time was come for confiding her secret, but the present was so happy, so full of content and restfulness, and she felt so certain that each day as it passed made her more and more dear to her young mistress, that she hesitated to endanger the affection which was gradually paving the way for an announcement for which Gabrielle was still unprepared.

CHAPTER XIX.

There, in a little grove of kindred, rise
Those tender plants, the human charities,
Which, in the world's cold soil and boisterous air,
Withhold their blossoms and refuse to bear.

Sharp.

As the season advanced, outdoor occupations had to be relinquished, but Gabrielle and her companion were rich in resources. The former observed with pleasure

that, although Heatherbrae had been lovely in the wealth of its autumn splendour, yet it gained unquestionably in beauty and verdure when compared with other places, as winter began to rob deciduous trees of their luxuriant foliage, and to spread a mournful carpet of withered droppings on the high roads and gardens of the valley.

Heatherbrae after snow was not like other places under the same aspect. The sun gleamed across the silver plain that had usurped the place of the ploughed field. The pine forest rose in the distance, still grand and sombre, though the receding layers of pine crests were now frosted with a hoary crown, and, in the hollow, the snow-bound cottage roofs gave them the appearance of Swiss chalets in a mountain pass. A lurid glare of snow-light lit up the horizon, and cast a bright gleam around the snow-tipt margin of the pine-clad height. Masses of golden-tinted cloud floated above, while intervals of blue sky appeared between, which deepened into a full-toned indigo in the distance. Nearer home the stately spruce held forth benignant arms laden with snow, the *pinis insignis* presented vast masses of snowy freight above, and deepest green foliage below; while the graceful deodora drooped her branches despairingly beneath their weight of wealth.

Christmas came, and the biting frost, the scarcity of work, and the utter poverty of the district of Kettlebury S. Anne's, provided Gabrielle with abundant objects for energy and benevolence.

Mr. Wheeler was not slack in drawing upon the resources of his Lady Bountiful, and Gabrielle was never so well pleased as when a party of shivering, half-clothed children, with purple toes appearing through their boots, were ranged round her kitchen fire, to be measured by herself and Aileen for stuff frocks and flannel petticoats, and fed by the motherly Molly with peas-porridge smoking hot.

That was a grand winter for Kettlebury S. Anne's. Never since the 'Maister's' death had the people been so well cared for. True, Adam Clark raised a depre-

cating voice now and then, when characters which fell below his standard of morality were clothed and fed like the rest. But, however much Gabrielle might abhor the vice of the parents, the little purple toes invariably made an appeal that her heart could not withstand. After a while she discovered an argument that even Adam could not gainsay. 'If they are so bad, Adam, so much the more reason they should not be left to die of cold and starvation. Let us hope we may be giving them time to repent.' Adam could but shake his head and say Miss Hope was giving no encouragement to well-disposed folk.

Who Adam's 'well-disposed-folk' might be was a mystery that had never yet transpired. Kezia and himself and their young ones were, of course, all well-disposed to the last degree. A married daughter with a tribe of little ones was a whisht, striving poor soul, and a fitting object for any bounty Miss Hope might have to bestow; while a relative near at hand received some slight modicum of commendation, and Adam's gracious sanction to any favours that might be granted her. But here the list of 'well-disposed folk' suddenly pulled up, and the rest were all idle, worthless characters, imposing upon Miss Hope's credulity, and to be discountenanced and utterly ignored.

Molly was a complete contrast to Adam. Her large heart and easy benevolence embraced all needy applicants. She had known want herself, as she often averred, and had many a time woke in the night gnawing her own arm for hunger. Perhaps this was the reason that every blue and pinched starveling was a 'blessed little lamb,' and why the back door of Heatherbrae was besieged all through that Christmas weather with applicants for blankets, coals, bread, broth, shoes, stockings, and every conceivable garment. If they had no want already Molly would find one for them, and, indeed, at length she found this liberal exercise of cheap benevolence so delightful and so popular, that even Gabrielle, with one of the largest hearts in the world, found it desirable to draw the strings of her pocket. She could

not find it in her heart to be angry with Molly, vexatious as it was to find she was being imposed upon, and that the gift of a new pair of shoes to-day did not prevent the re-appearance of the same purple toes a week later. She felt it, however, necessary to remonstrate, and to represent to Molly that charity, like everything else, should be judiciously administered, and that even the purse of the mistress of Heatherbrae was not inexhaustible.

‘That’s very true, ma’am, and I wouldn’t go for to vex you for the world. But, there, I’ve seen my own poor lambs a-crying with the cold, and most a-naked, and I’ve had nothing to give them but a chide and a shake, and my own heart breaking all the time, and sure ’tis so good to see the blessed little lambs a-chuckling over the fire, and a-filling themselves with the soup; and when a blessed young lady has her pockets full of money, and her heart full of goodness—why, there, I don’t altogether know what I’m after sometimes.’

It was indeed no easy matter to keep the balance of justice between dispositions so opposite as those of Adam and Molly. When talking to Adam, the young mistress felt a guilty consciousness that she was dispensing indiscriminate charity, and lessening the value of her gifts by bestowing them so much at random. But when Molly was the mistress, she felt no less stung with self-reproach if even a single ‘blessed little lamb’ of doubtful reputation were turned away without being clothed and warmed and fed. In vain she appealed to Mr. Wheeler for guidance. His impulses were much in accordance with Molly’s, and his knowledge of his own people was not sufficiently intimate to enable him to give much useful advice. In this dilemma, Gabrielle one day appealed to Dr. Blyth for assistance, which the young doctor readily afforded; and from that day much of his spare time was devoted to the organising and dispensing of Miss Hope’s charities.

Under his clear head and sound judgment, her benevolence was soon directed into wiser channels. Certain days were appointed for the distribution of soup, which,

out of deference to Gabrielle's scruples, was bestowed indiscriminately, that even the reprobates might have the chance of living to repent. Blankets were lent to all the families who could by any contrivance be classed under the head of deserving. A moderate amount of coal tickets were given away, and Molly's unlimited bounty was altogether suspended. This last regulation was a severe trial to Gabrielle, but she had the sense to perceive that the only other alternative would be the final dismissal of Molly, and this was a step she could not bear to contemplate. She was quite prepared for a furious burst of indignation and remonstrance on the part of Molly, when this part of the new code was made known; but, to her great astonishment and relief, Molly received the information with the utmost composure and acquiescence, and probably the only surprise she felt was that she had been allowed to exercise her generous patronage for so long.

Dr. Blyth's reform did not extend to the suppression of the many warm woollen garments over which Gabrielle and Aileen were so busy that winter. Many pleasant hours were passed by them over the great bale of Welsh flannel which the Kettlebury linendraper had sent to Heatherbrae. While they busily plied their needles, Dr. Blyth drew out coal and bread tickets, pondered over the merits of the applicants, and digressed not unfrequently into irrelevant, but not less agreeable, subjects.

Pleasant hours were those to Aileen. It had been delightful to stand behind Gabrielle's chair, and brush the soft tresses she already loved so well. Still more delicious had been their intercourse latterly, when Gabrielle altogether threw off the mistress, and treated her as a friend and companion. But now—when she was deprived of none of Gabrielle's society, and also admitted to the society and friendship of her other benefactor, and that, not on sufferance, but on terms of equality and mutual gratification, her happiness seemed indeed to have reached its zenith.

Arnold Blyth was a welcome guest at Heatherbrae.

He was earnest and simple-minded, full of the energy and impetuosity of youth, and moreover by birth one of a large family, which led him to find the cheerful parlour at Heatherbrae far more attractive than the solitude of his own fireside. Indeed, Gabrielle's clear, good sense and open heart, and Aileen's unobtrusive sweetness, combined to make the sunny sitting-room as pleasant a refuge as could be desired in the depth of a somewhat cheerless winter.

'I often wonder what brought you to Kettlebury,' observed Gabrielle, one day. 'With your ability and indomitable energy, I should have thought you required greater scope for action.'

'I have thought so myself sometimes, but it is quite a mistake. No man wants scope for action who has energy to make elbow room for himself. Circumstances over which I had no control brought me to Kettlebury, but my own free will keeps me there. There is plenty of scope for action, I assure you—plenty!'

'I know you are right and I am wrong,' said Gabrielle, candidly, 'yet I must own it appears to me that your life at Kettlebury must be one of unceasing drudgery, with nothing definite to look forward to.'

'Well, "better rub than rust," says the old proverb, and, you know, if I "gather honey all the day" for some years, why, I suppose, according to the parody, I may hope to end by "eating it all the night."'

'Ah! that would not do for you. An old age of ease and affluence is not the goal for which you would strain every nerve in your youth.'

'I hope not—that only comes in by the way. One might hope to do some little good on the road, though a doctor's mission is less to the mind than the body.'

'To both sometimes,' said Gabrielle, as her eye met Aileen's, and she read the thought that was passing through Aileen's mind. 'You have done good already to some, as I well know. But do you never feel a longing to do some great thing—something that shall make your name known after you have passed away?'

'I dare say I have felt such things, but then one might

waste a lifetime in looking out for the great something, which might never come after all. The small things do come every day, and I query whether the aggregate of small things does not far outweigh the great thing. I believe some apparently great actions do not cost half the energy, or patience, or self-devotion, of some small ones.'

'I wish I could learn that lesson,' said Gabrielle. 'The trifles seem so tedious, and there is nothing to show for them, and since small people have done great things in former times, why should not we?'

'They did the small things first,' said Dr. Blyth; and when the great thing came, it came as a matter of course—a feature in one great system—the act was nothing, but the self-discipline that prepared the way for it was everything. So it is in other matters—the scaffolding passes away and is forgotten, while the structure remains; but where would the structure be but for the scaffolding?'

'I should like to know what you call the "small things."'

'In my case they sometimes consist in leaving the fire-side on a stormy day to visit a case that I may benefit, though it is not one of life and death. Very often I find them in the utter ingratitude of patients whom I visit gratuitously, who abuse me for not coming oftener, and who, when I have cured them, attribute the cure to a neighbour's quackery, rather than to my skill.'

'Oh! that must be unbearable.'

'One thinks so at first, and resolves never to go near them again. A night's rest, however, alters one's views. I find myself, after breakfast, riding half a mile out of my way to repeat the visit, not for their benefit, but for my own. Well, that is an odd idea, is it not? Who do you suppose filled my head with such quibbles as these?'

'I can guess,' said Aileen, softly.

'Let me hear,' he said, turning round suddenly upon her.

Aileen flushed. 'It was only a fancy—it seemed as if it could only be your mother.'

'Right,' he said, with a gratified smile. 'It was my mother. A life like mine is full of such trifles—opportunities, suppose we call them—insignificant and patience-taxing to the last degree, yet I believe, on my honour, that many a man has won the Victoria Cross with less effort than is required to meet some of these very trifles.'

Gabrielle made no reply. She was lost in thought.

'Do you think you could bear them for a lifetime?' asked Aileen.

'Why, happily, I am never obliged to ask myself that question. I can bear them for the present, and that is enough. A lifetime is a vague term too. It may be long, and it may be short. It may be eventful, or it may be monotonous. I don't suppose life will ever be less bearable than it is at present, and I seem to thrive pretty well, don't you think so?'

'Yes,' said Aileen, with a glance at his open, healthful face, 'I think you do.'

'One of the great philosophers said that the three requisites for happiness were "a sound mind, a sound body, and a competence." I have all three, so you see I have nothing else to wish for—at present.'

'I can't agree with him,' said Gabrielle, 'bold as it seems to say so. There are surely troubles that affect neither mind, body, nor purse.'

'I suppose "body" must be taken in a comprehensive sense, and be made to include heart,' said Dr. Blyth. 'Health and wealth and wisdom would not cure what is commonly called a broken heart; but of course no one under such circumstances could be said to have a sound body. It is undoubtedly true that health and wealth have frequently no power of conferring happiness where the wisdom is lacking.'

'You said not "wealth" but "a competence,"' suggested Aileen.

'Very true—a competence generally produces more content than what we are apt to call wealth. It seems contrary to Nature's laws that any one should have

sufficient to release him from the necessity for self-exertion.'

'How severe!' said Gabrielle, somewhat piqued.

'I beg pardon; my thoughts were running upon men, rather than women. Those who have it have hardest work of all, for they have to do by spontaneous effort what our mother Necessity has done for others.'

'And what is that?'

'Carve out a life of usefulness for themselves: sew at Welsh flannel, make out soup tickets, and dispense their charities wisely, instead of sitting by with folded hands while the biggest knave gets the lion's share.'

Gabrielle laughed. 'These things seem so small.'

'So big, you mean—so immeasurably vast in their importance. The whole balance of right and wrong depends on such trifles.'

'But you admit they are trifles?'

'Yes, just as each separate particle of air is a trifle—a very essential trifle.'

'But then how do I know that the object of my life is to dispense soup tickets and sew Welsh flannel? A man in a profession is so differently placed, as you yourself admitted—your work made for you.'

'Well, these seem the best things at hand at present; if better calls come, you can but obey them. Meanwhile shall Fanny Doyle have a blanket and a coal ticket?'

'Mr. Wheeler would say "yes," he always does. Adam would say "no," for the same reason. Molly would say "yes," and Fanny Doyle herself would be with the ayes. The ayes have it, so I suppose she must.'

'Not a bit of it. Fanny has no vote, and I for one say "no"—the casting vote lies with you. Fanny is a disreputable chatterbox, never at home; the children ragged, unwashed, and uncombed, and the whole family no better than heathens. If Fanny is relieved, no one can be refused.'

'Then say she is not to have it. Why should you give me the pain of deciding against her?'

'Because Providence has placed the decision in your hands, and not in mine. It is part of your profession; and being wealthy does not exempt you from the obligations of wealth.'

'I like your vague theories better than your practical illustrations.'

'Very likely, and yet I should say you were the last person to wish to be a puppet pulled with strings.'

'I should have thought so too,' said Gabrielle, meditatively; 'but latterly I have often found it a great relief to allow myself to be secretly impelled by hidden strings.'

'It may be a wise hand or it may be a foolish hand that pulls, and the strings will be moved accordingly. It is safer to be self-dependent.'

'And what ought I to do now?'

'Well, perhaps you ought to investigate Fanny Doyle's case for yourself; but, failing that, if you have confidence in my report, and I would not willingly deceive you, you ought to say, with virtuous indignation, "Fanny Doyle, my blankets and my beef are for the well conducted, and you are not well conducted. Go home and mend your morals, and then some of my tickets shall be yours."'

Gabrielle laughed. 'Do you suppose I could ever speak to them like that? Remember, I have never been brought into contact with these people till lately.'

'Then you have much still to learn before you can be a good steward of your trust. As you have had so little experience, you can have no idea what an effect on a neighbourhood will be produced by a high standard of morality amongst the leading people.'

'But I don't like this way of teaching them to be better. Give them all they want, and then speak your words of wisdom to them.'

'That is not the way Providence deals with us. We are taught by trouble and pain and anxiety. The things we most value are withheld from us until we have proved ourselves worthy of the trust. Or if not, it is only because we are not worth correcting.'

‘But we cannot constitute ourselves Providences to those beneath us.’

‘No; but we may try to imitate the wisdom of Providence in our attempts to benefit them. If good and bad are to share alike, they will soon see that you yourself have no settled standard of morality. The mere fact of rewarding virtue and punishing vice reads to them a silent lesson more effectual than twenty sermons. They feel in their hearts that you are just, and they no more rebel secretly against your just decrees than they do against the dispensations of Providence.’

‘But the poor, poor children!’

‘Yes, that is sad; but it was long ago decreed that the children should suffer for the sins of the parents, and we must look to the good of the many, not the comfort of the few.’

‘But you let me give soup to them all.’

‘Yes—I let you,’ replied Arnold, smiling. ‘Not that I believe there is any danger of starvation amongst the people; but one would not willingly let them suffer hunger, knowing how it incapacitates them for work and drives them into sin. But the protest must be raised somewhere, and the only way that remains is through your Welsh flannel, your blankets, and your beef.’

‘I cannot help being very unhappy about the people who are refused.’

‘Very likely; you have a kind heart, but you must bear it. Next winter it will be their own fault if they are still excluded. I am not without hope that it will have a good effect upon some.’

‘Well, Mr. Mentor, put a cross against this disreputable Mrs. Doyle. When she next comes I will read her a severe lecture, and work myself up to a pitch of most virtuous indignation. After all, it is not half so pleasant to be rich as people think.’

CHAPTER XX.

The great secret of happiness consists not in enjoying, but in renouncing.—*Hyperion*.

THE dilatoriness of law proceedings still kept Cecilia in town, and Gabrielle received long and frequent letters from her, full of genuine distress at her unavoidable delay in returning. She was most sincerely troubled at being unable to occupy the place of friend and chaperone, upon which she had entered with such good will. She could not believe but that Gabrielle must be dull and lonely in her absence, and her own inclinations would also have led her to return to Heatherbrae as soon as possible.

But Gabrielle, though she would have rejoiced at her cousin's return, was by no means dull or lonely in her absence. On the contrary, every day was so full of interest and occupation, that neither Aileen nor herself found time hang on hand, though they rose in the morning in time to see the sun make his first appearance behind the Scotch firs that crowned Drumbleton Fort, and often sat over the glowing embers long after Molly and the rest of the household had retired to rest.

Increased intimacy with Aileen did not lessen the affection with which Gabrielle had learnt to regard her. On the contrary, every day and every hour, as it passed, served to reveal the truthfulness and tenderness of her character, and the innate elegance of her mind.

Meanwhile the days grew longer, and the sun increased in power. Snowdrops, crocuses, and polyanthus displayed their blossoms in the garden borders. The visits of Dr. Blyth had not ceased with the cessation of the winter distress. So many subjects of mutual interest had been discovered at that time, that when the original bond of soup and coal distribution had passed

by, the fact was scarcely observed, and Dr. Blyth still dropped in, as a matter of course, two or three times a week, sometimes in company with Mr. Wheeler, but more often alone, to renew some lively discussion with Miss Hope, while Aileen sat by, silently happy, not volunteering her opinion, but always prepared to give it if required.

Two additions had been made to the entries in Gabrielle's album. One was discovered by Aileen soon after the conversation given in the last chapter, and did not need the initials 'A. B.' to identify the source from which it came.

'Therefore should every man wait—should bide his time. Not in listless idleness, not in useless pastime, not in querulous dejection; but in constant, steady, cheerful endeavours, always willing, and fulfilling and accomplishing his task, that, when the occasion comes, he may be equal to the occasion.'

The other addition was a shorter one, and Gabrielle discovered it for herself. She had often asked Aileen to write in her album, but Aileen had invariably shaken her head, and appeared to shrink so much from doing so, that Gabrielle could not find it in her heart to coerce her. Yet she felt certain that none but Aileen would have thought of inscribing the two lines that filled up the page beneath the initials 'A. B.'—

Watering the heart whose early flowers have died,
And with a fresher growth replenishing the void.

Such a quotation might have been perplexing to a casual reader, but it in no way perplexed Gabrielle, though it added to the many proofs she was daily receiving that her young companion was no ordinary character, and that the tale of her past life would prove to be no ordinary tale.

How pleasant was the Heatherbrae drawing-room, with its bay windows filled with hyacinths and jonquils—the February sun endeavouring to extinguish the wood fire on the hearth, and the table littered with that

most inviting litter of books and work never to be found in a house without a mistress.

In this cheerful room, one afternoon, sat Aileen by herself, Gabrielle having gone into the garden without expressing a desire for companionship, in which case Aileen was studiously careful not to intrude on her young mistress.

The servant, unaware that Miss Hope was in the garden, presently announced Dr. Blyth, and Aileen found herself alone with the visitor.

'Miss Hope is in the garden,' she observed, when Dr. Blyth had shaken hands with her. 'I will go and tell her you are here.'

'Wait awhile, Miss Hart,' said the doctor, composedly. 'This is no question of life or death. Miss Hope will come in presently of her own accord, and meanwhile I have a few questions to ask you. Sit down yonder. You have not forgotten, I suppose, that you were once my patient.'

'No, I have not forgotten that,' said Aileen, quietly, while the colour mounted to her pale cheek, and she still continued standing, her head a little drooping, and her hands interlaced after a fashion of her own.

'Then I may still be permitted to enquire into the condition of your pulse, and the general state of your health.'

'Oh! I am well—quite well,' said Aileen, smiling.

'I think you are—I thought so before I asked. But I also want to know whether you are as healthful in mind as you are in body?'

'I should have thought with your penetration you could have answered that question as easily as the other.'

'I believe you to be happy, but I cannot be so sure of this as I can of your bodily health. Appearances are sometimes deceptive.'

'Not in this case. I am very happy. I expected only to find a considerate mistress, but instead of that I have found, as you know, one of the kindest of friends. Miss Hope allows me to be her constant companion,

and treats me as if I were—almost as if I were - a sister.'

'I see she does—it is just like her—I thought from the first her heart was in the right place. The arrangement has been a happy one in all respects, for Miss Hope would now have needed a friend and companion if she had not had you.'

'She shall never need one while I live. My only object in life is to try and be useful to her, and, if possible, add a little to her happiness.'

'You think so now—and certainly you do owe her a deep debt of gratitude. But let us hope that at seventeen you may not have a whole life of servitude before you.'

'Happy servitude with her,' said Aileen, lightly. 'I think, on the whole, this winter has been the happiest of my life.'

'Then your life cannot have been a very happy one,' said Dr. Blyth, so earnestly that the colour overspread Aileen's face, and her eyes sank beneath his.

'No, not very happy till now. I have seen a great deal of sorrow—perhaps that makes me the more thankful for this happy, quiet home.'

'Then you have no relations living—no father, mother brother or sister?' The tone of her interrogator was so earnest that she felt unable to evade the question.

'No father, no mother,' she repeated slowly after him. 'No brother to take care of me, nor any sister, unless I may call Miss Hope one. My life has been very lonely.'

'God sends protectors to those who need them,' he observed, in a low voice.

'He has been a Protector to me,' she replied. Then hastily moving towards the door, she said she would go and look for Miss Hope, and so left the room.

Gabrielle was strolling thoughtfully through the shrubberies when Aileen came in search of her. She went in at once, and Aileen remained behind, to wander about in a no less meditative mood.

Dr. Blyth's visits at Heatherbrae had sprung so

naturally out of his desire to be useful to Miss Hope, and he had occupied in Gabrielle's mind a place so much resembling that of her other visitor, Mr. Wheeler, that the idea of any question of propriety being involved in receiving him, now that she was without a protectress, had hitherto never occurred to her. Strange to say, the idea now presented itself in full force, awakened, probably, by some change in Dr. Blyth's voice or manner, and by reviving painful associations of her intercourse with Harold Bushby, destroyed the whole pleasure of what she had been used to find a very pleasurable interview. For the first time since their acquaintance commenced, conversation flagged, and awkward pauses ensued, during which the young doctor, apparently unconscious of the fact, gazed abstractedly into the fire.

When, at length, he rose to depart, Gabrielle drew a deep sigh of relief, and bade him adieu with even more of satisfaction than she had formerly bade him welcome. But although present anxiety was removed, the cloud rested on her spirit throughout the day, and it was not until evening that she was able, in any degree, to escape from the weight of it.

It seemed hard indeed that any feelings but those of peace and contentment should steal into that pleasant room, or disturb that calm fireside. When the crimson curtains had been drawn, the lamp lighted, and fresh logs thrown on the hearth, Gabrielle would draw the sofa nearer the light, and, with Aileen on a low seat opposite, would spend the evening in needlework, and such quiet conversation as she might feel inclined for. She found great comfort in being able, with Aileen, to talk or be silent, according to her mood. Even with Cecilia she did not feel so entirely free from restraint, but with Aileen silence often seemed even more sympathetic than an interchange of ideas; and on this evening, in particular, silence appeared to be the predominant mood of both, and thoughtful faces bent over the work on which they were intent, and the stillness of the room was broken only by the

crackling of the firewood and the movement of their needles.

But, ere long, Gabrielle, weary of her work and of communing with herself, tossed aside the former and moved nearer to the fireside, beckoning Aileen to the footstool at her feet, where, towards bedtime she was in the habit of taking up her position.

'I have been very absent to-night,' said Gabrielle, passing her hand kindly over Aileen's hair, as she sat beside her. 'You bear with my moods, Aileen—they do not seem to surprise you. We all have cares and anxieties at times, that distress and perplex us.'

'I am sorry if you have any new cares,' said Aileen, raising her face with the look of quick sympathy that was at all times so grateful to her mistress.

'I do not know whether it is an actual care, or only an imaginary trouble,' said Gabrielle, 'but the very uncertainty distresses me. How hard it is to be motherless at the very time when one most needs a mother's counsel! Ah, yes, poor child! you can sympathise with me in this need, and you see even wealth does not atone for the want of a mother's protection.'

'Yet I should scarcely have expected you to feel this loss so much,' said Aileen—'you who are so self-dependant, so strong and wise—as it seems to me.'

'As it seems to you,' repeated Gabrielle, sadly. 'So wavering and weak, as it seems to me. Come, let me be open with you, Aileen. I have told you matters affecting me much more deeply than the one now on my mind; and perhaps I shall find now, as I have more than once found before, that the simplicity of your judgment can help to clear up the intricacies that bewilder mine.'

Aileen lent a willing ear, marvelling much what was about to be confided to her.

'I told you of my visit to my father at Heidelberg, when I was but sixteen,' observed Gabrielle, 'and of all that grew out of my intimacy with Frank Kearney.'

What at that time passed between him and myself changed the whole colour of my life. I have never been able to rest upon the recollection of our mutual pledge with any feelings of joy or confidence, for as soon as I learnt to realise all that that pledge implied, I was also old enough, and worldly-wise enough, to know that Frank had been a dupe, and that he might with reason suspect me of having connived to dupe him. I always resolved that as soon as I became of age I would release him from his pledge, and set him free, if possible, to follow the dictates of his own heart. At the same time I have, of course, never felt myself free to give to other men the intimacy that is accorded to them by other girls. On this account, Aileen, you may imagine how difficult my position has been. I have done my best—I believe I may say I have done my very best—to walk uprightly in these respects, but not all my efforts have been able to keep me from some pitfalls and snares. I thought when I came to Heatherbrae I should be free from all trials of this kind, and so I might have been for a time, had not my uncle and cousin come to visit me, and brought in their train some of the gentlemen we both knew in town.

‘I need not enter particularly into what happened at that time, but, at all events, the few weeks we spent happily together ended very miserably for me. One of the gentlemen, whom I believed to be so universal a flirt that his attentions were a mere matter of course, proved to be more in earnest than I had imagined; and that pleasant visit resulted in his leaving Heatherbrae disappointed and unhappy, and in my remaining behind to load myself with reproaches for not having foreseen the result.’

‘However, even this trouble passed away in a measure, and I became cheerful and contented again, and through this winter I have had no vexations to annoy me, except the one great anxiety I have told you of, and which lies far deeper than all the rest. We have had a quiet and a happy time, Aileen, and not a little of

our cheerfulness has been due to the pleasant visits of Dr. Blyth. His clear, good sense was of the greatest service to me in my winter charities, and the healthy tone of his mind has often raised and braced my own.'

Aileen looked up with a keen glance of surprise and gratification.

'But, happy as we have been, it dawned upon me to-day that I was hardly right in allowing Dr. Blyth to visit here so much while I was without Miss Tudor or any other elderly lady. Suppose I were again to become entangled through want of caution! I should not now be able to plead even the poor excuses I consoled myself with last time. I have received a warning; and besides'—and Gabrielle gazed thoughtfully into the fire—'I feel as if, under present circumstances, the mere fact of any one thinking of me except as an ordinary acquaintance were other than it ought to be. When I meet Frank Kearney, if ever again I do meet him, I would do so with a clear, unflinching eye, as conscious that I have never admitted a thought, or said a word, that would be unbecoming in one who had pledged herself to him. Whatever may be my lot in the future, my duty for the present is plain, and I will try to fulfil it at whatever sacrifice.'

Aileen had raised her eyes for one instant during this speech, but dropped them again instantly, and Gabrielle was too much preoccupied to perceive that the crimson flush on her cheek was not the reflection of the firelight.

'I hate myself for being so suspicious,' continued Gabrielle, presently. 'It is contrary to all my natural impulses to be so, but it seems to me I must be either suspicious or too confiding. The thought may never have entered his head, nor be likely to enter it; but then, again, it may be there already, and I have no right, for my own pleasure, to run the risk of trifling with him. This is my dilemma. Oh, Aileen, advise me!'

Gabrielle waited for some moments, but there was no response. Aileen appeared lost in thought.

'I want your opinion, Aileen because I have turned the matter over in my mind, and looked at it under

every conceivable aspect, until I am fairly perplexed. You can take a free and unbiassed view, and your judgment is clear. Do you think I ought to let him continue his visits here or not?’

There was a moment's pause, and then Aileen said quietly, ‘Perhaps better not: it will be the safest course.’

‘We shall miss him—very much,’ continued Gabrielle, ‘and he will think it so strange—that is what most distresses me. I would not have him suspect my reason for the world. We must arrange to walk out at the hour he generally calls, soon after luncheon: he seldom comes at any other hour, except with Mr. Wheeler. We shall not then meet often, and by degrees the intimacy will lessen. I am very, very sorry, but I quite agree with you that it is the safest course.’

Aileen acquiesced, and when, according to her own pretty fashion, she kissed her young mistress's hand on parting for the night, she murmured over it a secret thanksgiving that, at whatever cost to herself, she had not been untrue to her vow of fealty to her sister.

Whatever Dr. Blyth thought of Miss Hope's constant absence from home when he called at his usual hour, he gave no sign of concern or discomfiture. He probably surmised that his visits were not so acceptable as formerly, for ere long he ceased to repeat them; and although, when he accidentally met Miss Hope and her companion in their walks, he was received with their usual friendliness, he yet made no attempt to recover his former footing of intimacy, and after a time Mr. Wheeler was the only guest who dropped in upon the quiet home at Heatherbrae with any degree of sociability.

Yet Gabrielle and Aileen were not unhappy—they were not even dull. The former had taken a fancy to gardening, and the sunshiny spring mornings were spent by both in the quaint garden, where they were sheltered from March winds by the pine plantation, and where Adam was well pleased to see them amusing themselves, and the more so because he found two longsuffering victims on whom to pour forth the vial of his shrewd,

but somewhat egotistical conversation. Even Adam's garrulousness had its compensating aspect, for every pathway and every shrub at Heatherbrae was bound up in his mind with some reminiscence of 'the old maister,' and Gabrielle learned to know more of her grandfather in this manner than she had been able to find out during the whole of her previous life.

Many hours of pure and unruffled enjoyment she passed tending her clumps of daffodil and narcissus, hailing the first bloom of the pink hepatica, and delighting in the fragrant sweetness of her wallflowers. Aileen was always by her side, watching to supply her merest want, sympathising with her enjoyment, and sharing all her schemes for beautifying, without materially altering, the garden at Heatherbrae. The bees were again busy with the blossoms, the birds sang their sweetest songs among the pine-trees, and the pure moorland air seemed to waft away all the feelings of weariness and discontent which had oppressed Gabrielle in her former home.

Nothing could surpass the beauty of a spring morning at Heatherbrae. The song of thrushes would wake Gabrielle at dawn of day, and she would uncloset her eyes to behold the room flooded with sunshine. At six o'clock Aileen's soft voice would inform her it was time to rise, and they would spend an hour together in the garden, while the dew was still resting on blade and blossom, before they were summoned to the breakfast-table.

If the early hours and the pure country air were producing a beneficial effect upon Gabrielle's health, the comfortable home, and the care and kindness she received, were no less bringing to Aileen's wasted cheeks a fulness and a rosy tint they had not borne for many a year. Gabrielle watched this improvement with the keenest satisfaction, and with growing affection. In poverty and ill-health Aileen's face had been a most interesting one, but it was now beginning to bloom into actual beauty, and Gabrielle, far too noble-minded to feel any sensations of jealousy, took a delight in noting the change in her favourite.

CHAPTER XXI.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows and sins ;
The days dividing lover and lover,
The light that loses, the night that wins ;
And time remember'd is grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,
And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

As Gabrielle's birthday approached, Aileen was much troubled between the desire of celebrating it in some appropriate manner, and the fear of displeasing her mistress by any little preparations she might make. For Gabrielle shrank from any mention of the coming event. This twenty-first birthday was likely to be a turning-point in her life, and she contemplated it with more of dread than satisfaction. Yet it pained Aileen sorely that the day should pass by unmarked.

So it was, however—a lovely stand of flowers on the breakfast-table, and Aileen's shy birthday greeting, were the only tokens that the day was different from other days—until Tom Clack and the post arrived. Then Aileen saw Gabrielle's colour change. She took her letters in her hand and left the room. For one moment her foot paused on the threshold of the staircase—then she changed her mind, and passed out into the garden.

She held several letters in her hand, but only one had had power to blanch her cheek. That letter was the last she opened. The first was from Mrs. Pierrepont.

' Bournemouth : March 16.

' My dearest Gabrielle,—I trust your twenty-first birthday finds you quite weary of ruralising. I never thought your whim would have lasted so long. Many

happy returns of the day, and may it never again find you at Heatherbrae.

‘And now, my dearest, you must pay us your long-promised visit. We have taken a house at Bournemouth for a month, and our chief reason was that we thought we should be more likely to induce you to come to us here than at Brighton. You have no idea what a sweet place this is—rather dull, perhaps, but then you will like it all the better for that. Our house is in the midst of the fir-plantation, and not far from the cliff. I assure you it is quite rural, and you can walk away over the common for miles and miles and see nobody. Pray come, and come at once, for I have no one with me but Alice Pierrepont, and she leaves me next week, so that I can’t think what I shall do if you don’t come. Your uncle has got a lovely bracelet for you as a birthday gift, but it is not worth while sending it, as you will be with us so soon.

‘Ever believe me

‘Your affectionate Aunt,

‘C. PIERREPONT.’

The next letter was from Emma Mostyn. She had received an invitation from Mrs. Pierrepont to meet Gabrielle at Bournemouth, and was radiant with anticipations of the pleasure of meeting again. A few lines from Miss Tudor conveyed her kindly congratulations, and regrets that she was unable to set out on her homeward journey, as she phrased it. And now all were read except the one of which she felt as if she would fain not have broken the seal. It began, as the other letter from the same source had begun—namely, without a beginning.

‘Has the date of the 16th of March been the point to which all your thoughts and hopes have converged for the past five years? If not, your experience has been very different from my own. The day to which I have so long looked forward is close at hand. It will already have dawned when you read these words. Believe me, my thoughts will be with you, though, from my inability

to form an idea of your real feelings on the subject which I need not name, I have refrained from intruding upon you until I receive your express permission to do so. The circumstances of our meeting are for you to arrange: I make but one stipulation, that we may meet speedily. And now let me express a hope that many anniversaries of this day may find you in health and happiness; may I also express a hope that no future anniversary may find us several hundred miles apart—nay, more, that, if it should be God's will, no future anniversary may ever find us otherwise than *together*? I dare not say more, in my ignorance of the state of your feelings towards me. There is only one fact upon which I can speak with any degree of certainty, which is that I am now, as ever,

‘Yours in deed and in truth,

‘FRANK KEARNEY.’

Gabrielle returned to the house, and strove, not without success, to make the breakfast-table cheerful to her young companion.

‘Aileen, should you like to go to the seaside?’

Aileen's eyes sparkled. ‘With you?’

‘Yes, of course: do I ever send you away from me? We will go together, and stay with my aunt at Bournemouth. I dare say we shall be absent about a month. Then we will return to Heatherbrae. If Adam does his duty, the garden will be in perfection upon our return.’

‘You are not tired of Heatherbrae?’

‘Tired of it! I live at Heatherbrae: I only exist elsewhere. Are you tired of it, Aileen?’

‘How can you ask me? I never had a home till I came here;’ and Aileen's eyes filled with tears. ‘No future home can ever be to me like Heatherbrae.’

‘Well, then, we are well agreed. Now I have two letters to write, and then we will walk to the top of King's Compton Beacon. That exhilarating breeze always dispels the vapours, and one ought to have no vapours on one's birthday.’

Gabrielle's letters were as follows:—

‘Heatherbrae: March 16.

‘Dearest Aunt Carry,—Many thanks for your kind wishes and invitation. I shall be very glad to see you and Uncle Pierrepont again; and although I am more enamoured of Heatherbrae than ever, I shall gladly join you at Bournemouth in the early part of next week. I shall bring with me my little friend and companion, Miss Hart, who is not a servant, though she does for me the few things I require. Emma Mostyn tells me you have invited her and Uncle Henry to meet me. This is very kind of you. Will you do me a still further kindness? I cannot receive bachelor friends in my spinster establishment, and I much wish to meet a friend of my father's and of my own, whom I knew at Heidelberg. I shall be truly obliged if you will invite Captain Kearney to visit you while I am with you at Bournemouth. I enclose his address. As we shall meet so soon, I shall not write more to-day. Tell Uncle Pierrepont I shall value the bracelet extremely for his sake and yours,

‘And ever believe me

‘Your affectionate Niece,

‘GABRIELLE HOPE.’

The next letter required more deliberation.

‘Heatherbrae: March 16.

‘I have this morning received your letter, and have already complied with the wish it contained. I think we had better meet under the roof of my uncle and guardian, who is at present staying at Bournemouth. You will receive an invitation from my uncle in the course of the next few days. I am fully sensible of the delicacy with which you have treated me throughout; and if I am sometimes overwhelmed with shame at the thought of what took place at Heidelberg, under the sanction of one who is gone, I can take comfort in the thought that it is not too late to repair the evil, and that

a mutual release is all that can be required. I am certain that he who prompted the pledge would now be the first to desire that it should be dissolved. Let us meet, by all means, and in a truly friendly spirit. And let us have the happiness of bestowing upon each other that priceless boon of freedom, the natural heritage of youth, which neither of us has yet enjoyed, and of which one only knows the value when denied the possession. My secret has for so many years been my own, that I can see no reason for divulging it now, and I trust your opinion will coincide with mine.

‘Believe me your true Friend,

‘GABRIELLE HOPE.’

She sealed the letter, hating herself for the spirit in which it was written, and yet resolved that no word or sign from her should do aught to prevent the final separation she was resolved upon. It was but bare justice to Frank Kearney, she told herself, and justice should be done; yet her heart smote her as her eye fell upon the album on the table at her side, and she felt that on her return to Heatherbrae one page must be obliterated, which she could never again look upon without pain.

She locked away the book, stamped her letters, and prepared for her walk. Aileen was already dressed. She had stored a little basket with cake and wine, and had placed in her pocket a small sealed packet, which had several times before accompanied her in her walks with her young mistress.

‘Now, Aileen, my birthday treat is to be a long walk. Have you strength for it—strength to mount the heather to the highest, highest point?’

It was a beautiful spring day; and as they trod the short turf, the wild heather, and the rugged paths that led across the common, their spirits rose at every step. A delicious breeze was sweeping the moorland; it was freighted with the faintest odour from distant peat fires. The golden blossoms of the gorse were bursting on every side. The moorland birds were wheeling around: the

solitary cry of a lapwing, or the joyous carol of the lark, alone broke the stillness. The moor, far as the eye could reach, spread its rich mantle of varied hues—purple blending into brown, brown flushing into red. The full-tinted outline stood forth against a sky of cloudless blue, broken only by a crest of ragged pine-trees, which spread their forlorn branches beseechingly to the mildest quarter of the heavens, as though protesting against the surging wind that had blighted their early promise of beauty, and distorted the natural symmetry of their growth.

It was not until they had gained one of the noblest heights of the Kettlebury moor, that Gabrielle paused, and turned towards her companion, who, like herself, was too breathless to speak.

‘Oh, Aileen! I fear I have tired you, but you must forgive me! Don’t you know that there are times when you feel that you must throw your whole energy into something, that the activity of the body may quench and silence the activity of the mind? Come, let us sit down. This is just the place I wanted to reach. There are “no sounds of worldly toil ascending” here. We may look straight up into the heavenly blue, and forget that rain-clouds ever hide it from our eyes, or bind down to earth the hearts that are longing to soar.’

They seated themselves on the short turf, and for some time contemplated in silence the view that lay before them. The lovely Kettlebury vale was enclosed by a hazy outline of blue hills against the horizon. The river gleamed at intervals in the landscape. Fertile meadow-lands were fringed with fell and copse. Wooded knolls rose here and there in the luxuriant valley, and nearer home the dark, pine-clad hill called Drumbleton Fort served as foreground to the picture.

‘Aileen,’ said Gabrielle, at length breaking the silence, ‘I have been thinking a great deal of my future life lately. When we return from Bournemouth there will be nothing further to break “the even tenour of our way.” Then the real business of life will begin. The

past has been only introductory, as it were—a trial of new ground, new pursuits, new aims. It is time to begin to work in earnest. Life may be long, or it may be short, but it must be made worth the living. I am not going to sleep and dream my life away. I should wish to spend it at Heatherbrae. This place is more like home to me than any other spot on earth. And it has claims upon me, which is more than I can say of any other place in existence. I shall live a very, very quiet life here, away from the busy, rushing world. I shall have few friends, probably, as time wears on. A forlorn maiden lady in a retired home loses friends, but she does not often make them. And you, Aileen, will you share this quiet, monotonous home-life, until, perhaps, in God's good time, you leave Heatherbrae for some happier home of your own ?

‘Will I ?’ Aileen’s voice was choked with emotion.

‘Not as hitherto,’ continued Gabrielle. ‘When we return from Bournemouth I wish you to consider yourself more entirely my friend and companion. I have no near relatives. My home shall be your home as long as we both live. I will be to you as a sister, and you shall not find yourself portionless at my death.’

‘A sister ! could you ever look upon me as a sister ?’ and Aileen trembled so exceedingly that her agitation well-nigh betrayed her.

‘I never had a sister, but it always seemed to me the sweetest, tenderest tie ! You, too, never knew what it was to have a sister, so we may at least persuade ourselves that we have at last found one ; and I do sometimes think, Aileen, that the feelings I have towards you must be very much like what an elder sister feels towards a younger one.’

‘If you can say such words as these to me, the time must indeed be come,’ said Aileen, kneeling at her mistress’s feet, and drawing forth the sealed packet. ‘You have asked me often for the story of my life, and I have never dared to tell it. Now I am going to risk my all—my all in this life—and lay before you the whole history of my past. You are too generous to cast me off when you

know all; but at all events the time has come, and I can keep it back no longer.'

'My poor little Aileen, why excite yourself so painfully?' said Gabrielle, affectionately. 'Be sure the circumstances of your birth will make no change in me: I love you for yourself, not for your parentage.'

'You do not know! ah! you do not know!' exclaimed Aileen, in still greater agitation. 'I have a picture of my father here: I will show it to you. Yes—whatever the consequences may be, I will show it to you.'

'Your father!' repeated Gabrielle. 'Do you mean that your father was known to me?'

Aileen's hands trembled so violently that she could scarcely untie the string that held her little packet together. Gabrielle untied it for her, and then Aileen, drawing the miniature from the silver paper in which it was folded, placed in her mistress's hand the portrait of Gabriel Hope.

Gabrielle uttered a cry—a cry of amazement, perplexity, and doubt. She gazed at the well-known features again and again, then at Aileen, who had covered her face with her hands—and once again at the portrait.

'What does it mean? I can't understand, Aileen. Where did you get this likeness of my father? How was my father connected with your father? You said you would show me the portrait of your father, and then you give me a likeness of my own!'

Aileen placed in her hand her mother's marriage register: the silent witnesses must plead for her; she had no voice to plead for herself.

Gabrielle unfolded the paper, and a long silence ensued—so long that Aileen's heart seemed to die away within her. Gabrielle was studying the record and the portrait, lost in thought—her mind wandering through the mazes of past years, reconciling apparent improbabilities, solving mysteries she had long thought incapable of solution, disentangling intricacies, and laying the facts of her father's life straight and clear before her mind's eye.

But Aileen could bear the suspense no longer. She thought her worst fears were realised—that Gabrielle's glance had grown cold towards her—that all the sweet intercourse of the past was at an end. She lifted her face, with terror and anguish written on her countenance, and met Gabrielle's perplexed look.

'What does it mean?' asked Gabrielle, still in a maze. 'Aileen, my Aileen, does it mean that you are my sister? Is it possible that I have a sister?'

She held out her arms, and Aileen sprang towards her, and the sisters were clasped in a close embrace, to be sisters now and to all eternity.

'But what miracle brought you to my roof, Aileen? Is it possible that it was merely what we call an accident that led your steps to me? This seems the greatest mystery of all.'

'It was no accident. Where could I go when I was left fatherless and motherless, and quite friendless, but to the place where my sister was living? I meant to find some situation in the neighbourhood, that I might see you sometimes, and I thought Providence would bring the rest to pass. I could never have dared to hope that Providence would take me to your own roof, and that I should be allowed to win the place of a sister before you knew even my name or my parentage.'

'Your name! Why, my Aileen, you are a Hope, then, like myself! Oh! how real this makes it appear! Aileen Hope—and I thought I was the only Hope left.' And Gabrielle imprinted kisses of the truest affection on her young sister's smooth brow, while Aileen only slipped from her grasp to cover with kisses the hands that embraced her. In her sweet humility she sank back at once into her former position of respect and dependence. To kiss the hand of her sister and mistress was all she aspired to: to have felt Gabrielle's kisses on her brow was happiness enough for a lifetime.

But this was not enough for Gabrielle. Moment by moment the joy of this discovery was breaking upon her. That she, who had been lonely all her life, should

now have discovered a tie of the sweetest kindred—a sister whom she already knew to be all gentleness and goodness, and all devotion to herself—was a joy beyond all words. Not one of the feelings with which Aileen's poor mother had invested her found a place in her heart—no sensation but that of true and pure rejoicing. A void in her life had been suddenly filled up.

A sister had been given her—not to wait upon and adore her—but whom she might love and tenderly cherish, and upon whom she might lavish all her care and affection; and her heart sent up its boundless love and praise to the Giver. Then she took Aileen's hand in her own, and drawing her to the ledge of short turf on which she was sitting, she put one arm round her waist, and said,—

'Aileen, I have always felt drawn towards you in a strange, unaccountable way. It has sometimes seemed to me unreasonable that I should have grown so fond of a perfect stranger. How often I have thought it over and wondered at myself; and yet, in spite of all that reason and prudence could urge, I always found myself loving you, and trusting you, more and more.'

'I hoped it might be so—I thought that it was so,' said Aileen, with a radiant look.

'And now, Aileen, all that I have is yours. Heatherbrae is your home, not by sufferance, but of right, and whatever it becomes me to have and to do will also be becoming to you.'

'Oh, no!' exclaimed Aileen, eagerly. 'I have no right to anything but what it may please you to give me. I know this, for I feared at one time it might be otherwise. Heatherbrae, and all your wealth, came to you through your mother, and I claim nothing but your name and your love, and I thank God that I have no right to more. It is fitting that all should be yours; but you are mine, and there is no joy and no wealth for me to compare with that.'

'My dear little sister, I am yours and you are mine, and the rest is as nothing. We will act together in all things. I shall have no secrets from you, and you will

have none from me. I have never in my life before had any one to whom I could tell all things.'

'I can scarcely believe that you know all, and love me still,' said Aileen, with swimming eyes. 'All my life long this has been my dream, and dreams are so seldom realised as this one has been.'

'So seldom,' said Gabrielle, thoughtfully. 'So seldom,' she repeated in a half-whisper as she descended the hill; and Aileen mused over this sorrowful echo of her words, and wondered what it might mean.

CHAPTER XXII.

Rest we, dearest, in our home,
Roam we o'er the heather :
We shall rest, and we shall roam—
Shall we not ?—together.

From this hour the summer rose
Sweeter breathes to charm us ;
From this hour the winter snows
Lighter fall to harm us :

Fair or foul—on land or sea—
Come the wind or weather,
Best and worst, whate'er they be,
We will share together.—*Praed.*

GABRIELLE was very desirous that her sister's incognito should be thrown aside before the visit to Bournemouth was paid. But Aileen shrank from accepting her new position in a house filled with gay company. She pleaded that she had never mixed in society; that even if Gabrielle considered her fitted for it, she should nevertheless feel embarrassed at first; and that it would be much more agreeable to her to preserve her incognito during the visit, and lay it aside on her return to Kettlebury.

Gabrielle was obliged to yield the point, for she saw that Aileen was painfully in earnest. She stipulated, however, that her longing to divulge the secret should be so far indulged as that Mr. Wheeler should be taken into their confidence, and that Mr. and Mrs. Pierrepont should be made aware of the tie that existed between Gabrielle and her young handmaiden.

'There is mystery enough already connected with me,' she said, with a sigh, 'which I feel I cannot reveal to either my uncle or aunt; and I do not wish to add to that. The secret of the last five years began under pressure from one whom I was bound to obey; and now that it has so nearly expired, I cannot make up my mind to lay bare such a painful story. In a few days, or a week, I shall probably bid farewell to Frank Kearney for ever: till then my secret must remain my own, and his, and yours. After that time I shall never allude to it again, and you must forget it as completely as I shall try to forget.'

Mr. Wheeler was less astonished at the announcement made to him by Miss Hope than she had anticipated. He lived so much in an imaginary world of his own, that the revelation surprised him much less than it would one of a more matter-of-fact turn of mind. It seemed to him the most natural thing possible that an amiable girl like Aileen should turn out to be the sister of so excellent a young lady as Miss Hope, and he was sincerely glad that anything should have transpired likely to conduce so much to her happiness.

It was with a heavy heart that Gabrielle bid adieu to Heatherbrae. She strained her neck to catch a glimpse of the gables, and of Adam pulling his forelock, and Molly bouncing violently up and down as long as the carriage remained in sight. Then she turned to Aileen and kissed her affectionately. 'I might have been travelling alone,' she observed, 'but now I can never be very lonely as long as you are with me. Let us hope we shall soon be returning to our dear home in better spirits than we are now leaving it.'

Aileen responded to the hope, and held up a sprig of

heather, which she had plucked from the hedge as the carriage brushed by.

'Yes, I will take that as a pledge that we shall return,' said Gabrielle, taking the sprig and putting it in her bosom. 'I have not wondered lately at Sir Walter Scott saying if he did not see the heather at least once a year he thought he should die. I believe if I spend many years at Heatherbrae, I shall feel the same.'

It was late in the day when they reached Bournemouth. Gabrielle asked to be shown at once to her own room, and there she was presently joined by her aunt.

'My dearest Gabrielle! I am so happy, so very happy, to see you once more. I could not have believed I should have missed you so much. But now that you are here we shall not part with you again, depend upon it. I am afraid you will not find these rooms so comfortable as your rooms at Headworthy, but it is only for a month, you know, and your rooms in Grosvenor Square are to be newly papered and painted and furnished by our return.'

'I am very glad to see you again, Aunt Carry. And you are looking so well. These rooms are very comfortable, I assure you; and I hardly expected you would have been able to spare me a sitting-room. We have had a prosperous journey, but I own to feeling a little tired.'

'You shall have some tea presently, and we shall dine before long. Who was the sweet-looking girl that vanished into your bed-room as I entered the room?'

'That was the friend I mentioned to you in my letter. I shall have more to tell you about her tomorrow, but there is no time this evening. She is rather shy, and will prefer remaining here to joining the party down-stairs. I suppose you have a full house, as usual.'

'Not very full; just the Hamiltons, and Mostyns, and Oldfields. Oh! and your friend Captain Kearney arrived at luncheon-time, and particularly pleasant he appears to be. He has been asking for you.'

‘Really! I shall myself feel quite shy amongst so many. Who is to take me in to dinner to-night?’

‘Captain Kearney, of course: I thought you would have so much to talk about.’

‘So we shall, perhaps; but it will not be dinner-table conversation. I would rather inflict myself upon some one else for the first evening. Perhaps you can bestow Emma upon Captain Kearney.’

‘Certainly, and Charles Oldfield shall take you in. You have quite a colour, Gabrielle. Those unhealthy marshes have not done you any harm, after all.’

‘Marshes! how can you transform a breezy common into a marsh? I shall take you back to Heatherbrae with me.’

‘Well, my dear, your uncle said it was undrained land, and so I thought it must be a marsh. I know that it is a desolate, uncivilised region, for Emma was giving Captain Kearney a description of it at luncheon-time. She said your domestics were dreadful, barbarous people, and that it was hardly safe for you to live in such a place; and Captain Kearney quite agreed with her.’

‘Captain Kearney!’ repeated Gabrielle, with slightly uplifted head. ‘He knows nothing of Heatherbrae but what Emma may please to tell him; and when I am not here to check her, Emma’s imagination is apt to run riot.’

‘It was a very amusing experiment, I dare say, and I am not going to quarrel with you now that it is ended. Here comes your tea: we dine in an hour.’

Mrs. Pierrepont hastened away. The tea was placed on the table, but speedily forgotten by Gabrielle, who was more silent and abstracted than Aileen had ever seen her. She stood for some time at the window, where she could catch a distant glimpse of the sea, then walked up and down the room several times, then gazed again out of the window.

At length Aileen, who had been taking some dresses out of a box, ventured to remark that it was time to dress for dinner.

'I suppose it is,' said Gabrielle, wearily. 'My dearest Aileen, what have you been doing? Remember, the work was to be mutual—only sister's service.'

'Younger sisters always wait on elder ones,' said Aileen, playfully. 'It is their privilege. What will you wear? This lovely new silk?'

'No, oh! no, the plainest and oldest dress I have. I will dress up in my "faded silk," like Enid. Or, stay, this white cashmere is better than a silk, more soft and noiseless, and plain enough in all truth.'

Aileen made no comment. She understood the feeling that suggested that there should be no external advantage of dress or ornament, and, although she might have wished it otherwise, she was too wise to remonstrate.

Only, when the white cashmere had been donned, and Gabrielle had seated herself to have her fair hair arranged, with the remark that she would wear no head-dress that night, Aileen assumed the privilege of a sister, and taking a few scarlet blossoms from a lovely nosegay of hot-house flowers that stood on the table, she ventured to place them between the golden plaits, trusting to Gabrielle, in her absent mood, failing to observe them.

She was not mistaken. When her sister left the room her mind was too fully preoccupied to suggest a parting consultation with the mirror. And, strong in her reliance upon Aileen's care for her, she went downstairs with the conviction that the crisis of her life had arrived.

She was somewhat late, and the drawing-room appeared full of people. It was brilliantly lighted, for Mrs. Pierrepont revelled in a blaze of light. No one who saw Miss Hope enter the room, with her steady step and controlled demeanour, would have guessed the agitation of her mind. She was glad to be seized upon by Colonel Mostyn and Emma, and her eyes studiously avoided further acquaintance with the occupants of the room.

'Your uncle is asking for you,' said Emma, presently,

and Gabrielle moved on to the point indicated, which was the hearthrug.

'Why, Gabrielle, you are quite a stranger; but never were you more welcome, my dear child. So you are not devoured by cannibals, nor even tattooed? Have you found out how bread and turnips taste, eh, Gabrielle?'

'I assure you, uncle, the Kettlebury cows are not to be surpassed, and there is no honey like the Heatherbrae honey. A land of milk and honey does not sound like a savage region, does it? If you had condescended to visit Heatherbrae I would not have fed you on bread and turnips.'

'I had no guarantee for that, and I don't think I could long have survived upon even syllabub and mountain dew. But, joking apart, I very nearly came after you when mistletoe and plum pudding arrived, and no Gabrielle. If you wanted to teach us your value you acted with consummate wisdom. We do not know our comforts till we lose them.'

Dinner was announced, and Mr. Pierrepont left Gabrielle's side. There was a general movement, and Gabrielle felt, rather than saw, that the one person of whose presence in that room she had all along felt conscious was by her side. Her hand was taken, and closely clasped for an instant. Who, but one, would receive her with a silent greeting? Yet her eyes never lifted themselves—she felt as if she could not meet the gaze she had not met for five years. As she stood there, in her simple white drapery, with bent head, and fair profile, the light falling on her golden hair and Aileen's scarlet blossom, who shall say whether or not she realised Frank Kearney's vision of the maiden from whom he had parted at Heidelberg?

'Miss Hope,' said a voice at her side that was no Frank Kearney's, 'I am so glad to have this opportunity of renewing our old acquaintance. I am to have the pleasure of taking you into dinner.' Gabrielle started; Mr. Charles Oldfield was offering her his arm; the silent clasp relaxed, and she moved away.

It was some time before she could venture to glance at Emma's companion, who was seated on the opposite side of the table, so that she could observe him without much effort. When she was able to do so, she was struck with the change that five years had wrought on the countenance she so well remembered. It was not only that whisker and moustache had altered the contour of the face, and helped to remove the youthful and boyish expression that had formerly marked it, but the whole countenance was now characterised by a decision and firmness for which Gabrielle had not been prepared. The face was not, strictly speaking, a handsome one; yet the keen brightness of the dark grey eyes, the aquiline nose, and the amiable, yet resolute, mouth, were all pleasing, and when every feature seemed suddenly lit up with animation, as was the case when the conversation turned upon topics in which he was interested, the critic forgot to be severe.

'If I were inclined to be a trifler,' thought Gabrielle, 'that is not a man to be trifled with. There is the same face that I remember, but how developed in power! How has he ever submitted to the thralldom that has been so galling to me? I wonder whether I appear as much altered in his eyes as he does in mine!'

As these thoughts passed through her mind she suddenly met the eye of the person whose countenance she was so intently studying. The colour suffused her face, and she instantly withdrew her gaze. Perhaps if she had known how constantly and how earnestly she had herself been watched, she would scarcely have ventured upon trying the experiment in return.

After dinner the ladies in the drawing-room were soon joined by some of the younger gentlemen, who had no fancy for sitting long over their wine. Emma was in the act of interrogating her cousin about her country home.

'How is that ubiquitous Adam, Gabrielle, and that concentrated essence of nightmare whom you call "Molly?" That woman has poisoned my rest during the whole of this winter. I have never dared encounter

darkness since, and my own shadow gives me a tremor from head to foot.'

'We don't indulge in nerves at Heatherbrae,' said Gabrielle. 'Molly is in rude health, and Adam as useful and obliging as usual.'

'And Mr. Wheeler as antediluvian, and Mrs. Melville as much devoted to agriculture and croquet, and the dimple in Miss Louisa's chin as charming as ever? Really, Gabrielle, what a set of horrors you have taken up your residence amongst! The very recollection makes me shiver.'

'I am fond of these people,' said Gabrielle. 'They are not all cut and carved upon a given pattern. There is scope for originality in a rural district like Kettlebury S. Anne's.'

'Originality!' and Emma shrugged her shoulders. 'I should have thought, if that was all you required, you might have sufficed for your own contentment, my good cousin. Now, I appeal to you, Mrs. Oldfield; don't you think Miss Hope may lay claim to some originality, having built a house in a bog, and set herself to reclaim the soil, and the ruffians who previously tenanted it?'

'I think Miss Hope may at least lay claim to being very strong minded,' said Mrs. Oldfield, politely.

'Oh! she is strong minded to a degree!' exclaimed Emma. 'She barricades her doors, and sleeps with a revolver under her pillow, and is altogether such a tower of strength to the neighbourhood that they have dismissed a sergeant and two policemen since her arrival.'

'May not that be in consequence of the reformation of the aborigines?' demanded Captain Kearney, who was standing behind Mrs. Oldfield's chair.

'No, indeed!' said Emma. 'Kettlebury is a perfect Tipperary. Shoeless toes and toeless stockings, coal-black eyes and matted hair, are the order of the day—gin-distilling all day, and gin-drinking all night.'

'Let us trust the toes have at least found shoes since Miss Hope's arrival,' said Captain Kearney, 'and that the potheen has given place to tea and gruel. I dare say

the bog has been drained and a model Church and parsonage erected at Miss Hope's expense.'

'I found nothing to do at Heatherbrae,' said Gabrielle, 'but carry on the good work my grandfather had commenced.'

'And you really enjoy the country, Miss Hope?' observed Mrs. Oldfield, deprecatingly. 'I wish I could feel more attached to my native land. Our English climate kills me; I never begin to exist till June.'

'Indeed I do love our English climate!' exclaimed Gabrielle, roused into animation. 'Yes, Aunt Carry, notwithstanding your look of utter bewilderment, I do stand up in defence of our English climate. Changeable! so is everything in this world—its very changeableness makes it so charming. Who would wish that it should be always May? Who does not weary of a long uninterrupted spell of summer sunshine?'

'My love, my love, we never have the chance of growing weary in England.'

'Seldom, I grant you. So much the better. We prize the sunshine when it comes. In what other land is an unclouded day of summer brightness so exquisitely delicious as in England? Tell me where else you would feel so braced up and exhilarated as you do when you first open your window on an early September morning? Where do you see anything so lovely as the mist that hangs over the landscape like a silver veil on a morning in October?'

'Where would you feel so disposed to perform the pleasing operation of cutting your throat as in the golden fog of a November morning?' observed Mr. Pierrepont, who had just entered the drawing-room.

'If so, you would cut your throat in any climate, uncle,' said Gabrielle; 'and you have no right to trace your despondency to the effect of an English autumn. Do you suppose we should care half as much for Christmas holly and hoar frost if we had not passed through a preparatory ordeal? I cannot imagine feeling so clear-witted and energetic in any other climate as we do in

England. And you must admit that our changeable weather is a glorious discipline for the temper.'

'A glorious irritant, Gabrielle,' said her uncle. 'I am afraid you are the only champion our atrocious climate is likely to secure.'

'Not the only one,' said Captain Kearney. 'I have seen a good deal of other lands, and always return more and more contented with my own.'

Gabrielle, who had forgotten her own personality in the warmth of discussion, now became suddenly self-conscious, and relapsed into silence, while others took up the question with some interest, but less warmth.

Mrs. Pierrepont presently asked for some music, and Emma and Miss Hamilton went to the piano, where they were joined by some of the gentlemen. Captain Kearney took the chair Miss Mostyn vacated by Gabrielle's side, and reopened the conversation.

'Then a gay life has few charms for you?' he observed.

'I am not fond of what is generally called a gay life,' said Gabrielle, looking down, well aware that the bright grey eye she had met across the dinner-table was bent upon her with no ordinary expression.

'A mind at peace with itself does not crave the distractions of society.'

'It would not be safe to infer so much from my love of the country,' said Gabrielle. 'I was surfeited with dissipation. I fear my mind was far from being at peace with itself when I first went to Heatherbrae.'

'Let us hope it is more so now.'

'I fear not. Some minds seem born for unrest, and I sometimes think mine is one of them.'

'I should not have said so.'

'Because you do not know me.'

'I once thought I did.'

'Characters change much in a few years when we are young. Have you never looked back upon the self that you were five years ago with a feeling of surprise and unfamiliarity?'

'Surprise, perhaps, but hardly unfamiliarity. Rather

as though I were contemplating a younger brother, who by the time he reached my age would be much what I am now.'

'I do not think that is my feeling. But if I could succeed in regarding my former self as a younger sister, it would be as a younger sister to be revered and envied, and I should hope that time might never do for her what it had done for me.'

'There is truth in both aspects. We lose in simplicity as we gain in wisdom.'

'And who shall say that we are gainers by our loss?'

'Yes, we are gainers,' said Captain Kearney, thoughtfully. 'Who would retain simplicity at the expense of wisdom? We cannot but crave for knowledge, even though we are aware that knowledge will entail more of pain than of pleasure.'

'Then surely we are foolish in our wisdom.'

'Ah! but, as Artemus Ward says, "there is so much of human nature in us!" We cannot but put away childish things. And, remember, there is a simplicity that is not the simplicity of ignorance, but the purity of a guileless heart. This is far higher—far better.'

'But how rare! Even a writer like Southey could venture to say that the first twenty years were the best of our lives, and that the longer we lived, the farther we drifted from our standard of goodness.'

'Believe him not! He may have penned the sentiment in a hasty moment, but I will never believe he would have endorsed it. Surely the hoary head in the way of righteousness is to be preferred to the innocence of the babe who never sinned—fidelity proved, to fidelity untried.'

'I cannot tell.'

'You believe in such a thing as fidelity?'

'In things spiritual,—oh! yes.'

'And not in things temporal?' Captain Kearney's voice sank, and his tone was painfully in earnest.

Gabrielle flushed: 'I cannot tell—at least, in things temporal, there are many points to be considered. After all, what is fidelity?'

‘Sincerity, unchangeableness, faithfulness.’

‘Surely, in temporal matters, faithfulness is a relative virtue. We may be faithful to a cause that is unjust. There have been cases ere now where faithfulness has degenerated into mere obstinacy. There have been other cases where faithfulness to a rash vow has involved a sacrifice of human life, as in Jephtha’s case, or, again, in that of Herod.’

Captain Kearney looked troubled. ‘I cannot follow you. It may be as you say, but of this I am no judge. You are in deep waters, and I would not willingly follow out of my depth. Let us hope such cases are rare.’

‘Oh, Aileen! I am so weary!’ said Gabrielle, when she entered her own room that night, and found her faithful Aileen on the watch for her. ‘You are much better off with your cozy fire and your book. I wish we were at Heatherbrae again.’

‘You have not had a pleasant evening,’ said Aileen, anxiously.

‘Oh! yes, very pleasant—very pleasant, that is, to every one but me. It would have been pleasant to me if I could see and not feel. Who is it says, “This world is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel”?’

‘And yet one could not endure to look upon life as a comedy.’

‘No, I suppose, however much one suffered, one would not willingly part with any power of sensation. The higher a nature is, the greater its capacity for suffering; yet who would consent to be less than the man he is?’

‘Capacity for suffering includes capacity for enjoyment,’ suggested Aileen.

‘Very true; all things are more or less equal in this world. But it is too late for metaphysics to-night. I am concerned when I think how lonely your life here will be, Aileen.’

‘Oh! no; to-morrow I shall explore the sands and the pine-wood; and I shall have glimpses of you

between whiles. I am much happier here than I should be downstairs.'

'If I did not believe that, I could not have consented to the arrangement. It is only too delightful to have you all to myself in this way,' continued Gabrielle, as Aileen knelt at her feet, looking up at her face in the firelight. 'If I had not you with me, you can have no idea how lonely I should be feeling to-night. Far lonelier than at Heatherbrae.'

Aileen's countenance beamed with gratification. 'I can never feel lonely while you speak such words to me as these. I never ventured to hope that I could be a comfort to you.'

'What! not when you recollected your own friendlessness, and remembered that I was fatherless and motherless like yourself! Were you so simple as to think money could make the difference?'

'I don't know,' said Aileen, thoughtfully. 'I had a great deal to learn; so I have still, though I have learned much. I am learning now—more than you think, perhaps—and I wish I could venture to speak my hidden thoughts; and yet perhaps it is better not to do so.'

'Far better,' said Gabrielle, quietly. 'We cannot judge for one another in this world.'

Not even the tenderest heart, and next our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh.

We sigh to-day, and smile to-morrow—so look forward to our return to Heatherbrae, when I shall enjoy, for the first time in my life, the priceless possession of freedom. Do you remember Miss Tudor's canary, Aileen, that spoilt, petted bird, when it contrived to open the door of its cage one day? How it went darting wildly up towards the sunshine, and then dashed downwards into the midst of the flowers, and seemed beside itself with joy! Poor little bird! It found freedom very sweet.'

Aileen was silent, and after a time Gabrielle remarked that it was late, and that it had been a fatiguing day, and the sisters retired to rest.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I would not be a woman like the rest,
A simple woman who believes in love
And owns the right of love because she loves.
And hearing she's beloved, is satisfied
With what contents God: I must analyse,
Confront and question; just as if a fly
Refused to warm itself in any sun
Till such was *in Leone*: I must fret
Forsooth because the month was only May,
Be faithless of the kind of proffered love,
And captious lest it miss my dignity.

Aurora Leigh.

THE next morning Gabrielle awoke cheerful and self-controlled, refreshed by a night's rest, and no longer oppressed by the despondency that had troubled her the previous day.

When the late breakfast was over, some of the visitors proposed a walk to the sands, and Captain Kearney, having overheard Miss Hope request her uncle to grant her an interview during the morning, resigned himself to the alternative of a stroll with Gabrielle's cousin, who was not loth to appropriate the cavalier from whom Miss Hope withdrew herself.

How perverse is human nature! We fling aside that which we desire not, yet we cannot endure that another should take the jewel we have rejected, and wear it conspicuously with joyous delight and pride. Gabrielle watched Captain Kearney's steady step, and Emma's state of radiant satisfaction, so long as the party to which they belonged were in sight, and then turned from the window with a sense of vague annoyance, which she studiously thrust down out of sight in the depths of her own bosom.

Her interview with her uncle and aunt proved a vexatious one. She had imagined that she had but to break to them the news of her discovery of an undreamt-of

sister, for Aileen to be welcomed by them as cordially as she had been welcomed by herself. Never was she more deluded. Happily, Aileen was not present, or Gabrielle's indignation might have become uncontrollable.

At first Mr. Pierrepont treated the announcement as a joke. 'So your romantic retirement from society has borne some fruit at last, Gabrielle. The very thing you most desired has dropped from the clouds, eh? A full-fledged sister, ladylike and refined, well educated and accomplished, as if she had been reared in the first circles of Belgravia. I am rather taken by surprise, I confess. I was prepared to hear that you had adopted, and contemplated educating, the son of some convicted poacher or transported felon, and I should only have shrugged my shoulders and marvelled at the insatiation; but when it comes to your composedly asking us to open our arms to a new niece, the child of no one knows whom, and bred no one knows where, I am inclined to think you guilty of more than amiable weakness, and to recommend tonics and change of scene.'

'It is simply monstrous, Gabrielle,' said her aunt. 'You, who were always so clearsighted and practical, to be duped in this transparent manner!'

Gabrielle bit her lip. 'I ask you to believe nothing that I cannot prove. I knew I should find it necessary to prove everything step by step. I have taken pains, already, to verify Aileen's statements. Here are her own proofs—the marriage certificate—my father's portrait—my father's letters to her mother. Here, also, is a letter I have received from the clergyman who attended her mother's deathbed, and another from the clergyman whose name is on the marriage certificate—who is still living. I knew you would require these proofs, and I wrote for them immediately. If you can detect any imposture I am open to conviction.'

Mr. Pierrepont was much annoyed. 'This is no new story to me, Gabrielle. I received more than one letter from this Mrs. Hope, as she called herself, while she was living. The first I answered—the rest I treated with the contempt they deserved. Keep this girl with you, as

your servant, by all means, if it pleases you, but don't try to make yourself and us ridiculous by establishing any nearer connection. I dare say she is a good girl enough, but your own common sense will tell you that she is low-born, ill-educated, and ignorant of the usages of society.'

'What! the sweet-looking girl Aunt Carry admired yesterday! my gentle, refined, sensitive Aileen! Accomplished she is not—educated she is. Her mother was a governess, and Aileen knows as much as most of the elegant young ladies who have been reared in the sacred precincts of Belgravia. She is pure-minded and refined, and so true in her faithfulness to me that if she heard what you are now saying, she would fly from me and hide her head for ever, rather than run the risk of exposing me to ridicule.'

'Then, my dear, in the name of common sense let her go. Find her some comfortable situation—your aunt always knows of some; give her a hundred a year out of your own pocket, if it is any salve to your conscience; write to her sometimes, if you wish it; but do let us hear no more of sisters and Hopes and marriage certificates, for I am too much a man of the world to be able to listen to you with any degree of patience.'

'God forbid that I should force my Aileen upon unwilling relations,' said Gabrielle, proudly. 'My sister she is—my own and only sister—my father's daughter. I will carry her back with me to Heatherbrae, and say good-bye to a world I never much cared about.'

'And to your uncle and aunt too, I suppose, Gabrielle,' said Mr. Pierrepont.

'Not willingly—no, uncle, indeed, not willingly, unless you desire me to choose between my uncle and aunt, and my sister. Surely you cannot expect me to be dead to all bonds of natural affection! I have asked you to disprove my proofs; failing that, I shall look upon Aileen as a sister—my nearest relation in this world.'

'There are things that cannot be disproved, yet should not be acknowledged, Gabrielle. As I said

before, be kind to this girl, give her two hundred a year if you choose, only don't make yourself ridiculous.'

'Two hundred a year instead of a sister's love!' said Gabrielle, bitterly.

'My dear, at least give her her choice,' said Mrs. Pierrepont. 'You don't know what two hundred a year is to one who never had a five-pound note. Or, if you won't do that, put her to a good school, educate her thoroughly, and then marry her respectably. I am sure your uncle and I will gladly consent to anything reasonable.'

'But unhappily these propositions seem to me most monstrously unreasonable,' said Gabrielle, hastily. 'Aileen Hope shall be treated by me as a sister, and a very dear sister, until she is proved to be no sister. O Uncle Pierrepont, don't be vexed with me—you know my impetuosity of old. It is no want of affection and respect to you and Aunt Carry that makes me speak in defence of my sister. I never doubted that you would receive her as a niece.'

'Impossible, Gabrielle. You are heated and excited just now; take time to cool—take time to reflect; your better judgment will soon come to your assistance. You have lived, my dear, in this romantic retreat until you have forgotten the ways of the world, and the claims of propriety.'

'Yes, thank God!' exclaimed Gabrielle, and bitter retorts trembled on her tongue; but her 'romantic retreat' had at least taught her some lessons that ought now to bear fruit, and the fruit in the present case was the 'keeping the door of her lips.'

Mrs. Pierrepont, who had views of her own, here interposed to close the conversation. 'It is of no use discussing this subject any further to-day. Let us all take time for consideration. Perhaps a careful review of the documents may throw some light upon the subject, or Gabrielle may see reasons for altering her opinion. There has been quite enough said for the present, at all events.'

Gabrielle acquiesced, glad to escape from so painful

an interview. When she was gone, Mrs. Pierrepont observed, 'My dear, she is perfectly infatuated; it is no use reasoning with her. Dear girl as she is, she was always self-willed—just like her father. Now, I have an idea that it will be much better to work upon that young person. You heard all that Gabrielle said of her. She does not appear to have inherited the Hope characteristics. She will see reason much more quickly than Gabrielle. If she understands that her presence is an injury to Gabrielle's position in life, she will at once acquiesce in any arrangement that may be suggested for her removal. I may get her some excellent situation as a governess or companion; and no doubt it might be contrived that she should drop the name for the present.'

'Well, my dear, women sometimes succeed where men fail. As to acknowledging her, the idea would be ludicrous if Gabrielle were not so preposterously in earnest. Your brother Gabriel may have had half a dozen other wives for aught we know. I am determined to stand aloof from the whole matter. It is all of a piece with that "great dismal swamp" and the bread and turnips. I cannot find it in my heart to be angry with her, and yet she is intolerably provoking.'

Gabrielle meanwhile slowly ascended the stairs. 'My Aileen! my poor little Aileen! If you had heard one half they said you would have spread your wings and taken flight for ever. Never mind, my own little sister, you shall never hear of it; and when this weary month is over we will go back to our dear home, and dear, dear good Mr. Wheeler, who believed it all directly. And we will tell kind Dr. Blyth, and he shall rejoice with us, and Molly and Adam, and all the good simple souls. And you, Captain Frank Kearney, shall never have the chance of prating about "worldly wisdom," or of rejecting Gabrielle Hope's little sister. I am spared that humiliation at all events. All things are for the best, and we will lead a quiet, peaceful life at Heatherbrae, and forget this hateful self-seeking world.'

Gabrielle's room was untenanted. Aileen had gone for a walk.

Feeling unable to join the party at luncheon, and longing for freedom and solitude, Gabrielle arrayed herself in walking attire, and proceeded to follow her sister's example.

As she left the house, she saw Emma and Captain Kearney approaching by another path. 'Whither are you bound, Gabrielle?' asked her cousin. 'Is it not nearly luncheon time?'

'I think it must be,' said Gabrielle, as she opened the rustic gate that led into the pine plantation. Once beyond the precincts of the garden, her step was light and elastic. No ground is so delicious to walk upon as the soil in such a forest of pine-trees as she was now exploring. Whether the continual accumulation of fir-needles produces the wonderful lightness of tread with which you pass over such pathways, and whether the intersecting roots beneath occasion the hollow sound which accompanies the lightest step, I know not; but the result is unquestionably delightful, and Gabrielle, in her *harried* mood, soon found refreshment in the endless vistas of pine-trunks, the occasional glimpse of the sea beyond the cliff, and the weird, gnarled stems of ancient pine-trees around her, which called to mind the grotesque and mysterious forms of some of Doré's conceptions.

At length, somewhat breathless, she seated herself on one of the twisted trunks by the side of the path. A more secluded spot could scarcely be imagined. Pines above, pines beneath, pines around her on every side, far as the eye could reach! A soft monotonous brown tint pervading all things, save where the brown developed into a sparse blueish green foliage, where the trees gazed upward to the sky. Most restful was the silence. Gabrielle fell into a trance, her thoughts wandered back to Heatherbrae—to the spring mornings when she opened her window and admitted the flood of golden light, by which the sun announced his arrival above the crest of Drumbleton Fort. Her thoughts wandered

forward, to the Heatherbrae of the future—to the quiet, uneventful years that might pass over her head and find her still tending her wallflowers and lilies, still sewing at Welsh flannel, still welcoming Mr. Wheeler, childlike and simple as ever, but now grown old. She scarcely knew whether the vision was pleasing or unpleasing, but, whichever it might have been, it was destined to be speedily dispelled.

‘Will you forgive me for venturing to intrude upon your solitude?’

Gabrielle started and looked up. Captain Kearney was leaning against a pine-tree in front of her, and, though the words were apologetic, the expression of his face seemed to say that the time for explanation had arrived, and, in all kindness and tenderness, that explanation he had come to demand.

Gabrielle recollected herself in an instant. The absent expression which her face had worn a moment before vanished, and, rising from her seat, she stood before him, not irresolute and wavering, but as one whose mind was made up, and who was not lightly given to change.

Captain Kearney was no blunderer—he had read her character at the first glance. He had not acted upon mere impulse in following her now, instead of waiting for a more orthodox interview in Mr. Pierrepont’s study.

‘You know why I am here,’ he said, and there was much sweetness in the expression of his countenance, and in his tone as he spoke. ‘We are not met in the same house for the purpose of avoiding one another, nor is there any reason why we should shrink from speaking upon the subject that is next the heart of each. I felt that you would pardon my intrusion—indeed, I felt that I had the right to follow you.’

‘Believe me, I have no wish to avoid you,’ said Gabrielle, looking with truthful eyes into his. ‘If I appeared to do so it was merely because I felt that our first conversation could not be upon ordinary topics. I am glad you have followed me now. Why should we not understand one another at once?’

Captain Kearney looked grave. 'I am afraid I do not wish to understand you. It was not with these fearless eyes you looked into mine last time we met.'

In spite of all Gabrielle's resolutions to appear indifferent, the fearless eyes drooped beneath his earnest, reproachful gaze, and the accompanying allusion to the past. She bent her eyes on the ground, and resolved not again to run the risk of raising them to the features she so well remembered.

'Listen to me,' said Captain Kearney, earnestly. 'Mine is the right to speak first, and no feeling of courtesy shall make me waive my privilege. I am not come here to-day to claim anything of you as of right my own. God forbid. I come to ask to be allowed to begin afresh as though I were a stranger—to woo and to win, as though we met now for the first time. This is all I plead for. Let the past be as though it had never been. Let it be wiped out from our memory. Let our acquaintance commence fresh and green, as though we had never sat side by side amid the ruins of Heidelberg, and there discovered similarities of taste and of principles. Let the "dead past bury its dead," and the future bring weal or woe as Providence may ordain. Will you agree to this?'

Gabrielle shook her head. 'No, it would be hypocritical in me to do so. My mind is made up, irrevocably. Let us break the fetters we have groaned under for years. By mutual consent we can do so. One who is gone must long since have mourned over the chain he laid upon our spirits. Let us do this justice to his memory.'

Captain Kearney looked disturbed. 'Have you any reason—any special reason you do not like to urge, for wishing this to be so? If so, I implore you to be candid. At any cost of present pain, be open with me.'

'I have none,' said Gabrielle, calmly, 'none, but an intense desire for freedom. I shall return to my country home and lead a quiet, single life. I have no love for the world. One friend I have, who will pass her life by

the side of mine, and help me to carry out the plans I have formed. I ask but to be free. I wish to know that you are free. Will you refuse me this boon ?'

Captain Kearney pondered. 'Is this then to be the end of all? Is this to be the only result of a meeting upon which for years past I have built all my hopes for the future? Has personal intercourse only served to confirm you in the views which you expressed in your letter to me? Am I so changed, are we both so changed, that the feelings you had for me five years ago have no longer any existence?'

'Captain Kearney,' said Gabrielle, hurriedly, 'the past has been a great mistake. I am only thankful that it is not too late to remedy that mistake. You know the words—

If 'tis sweet for love to pay its debt,
'Tis sweeter still for love to give its gift.

'I deny that it is sweet for love to pay its debt; it is galling, it is humiliating, it is contrary to the very essence of love that the thought of debt should be associated with it. Love can never give its gift to you or to me. What you propose to give is a debt, and I scorn it. I cancel the debt, and I ask you for nothing in return but freedom, the freedom I have never known, and for which I have always pined—the freedom without which life will be a burthen to me.'

The steady grey eye never left her face while she gave impetuous utterance to these words. Captain Kearney remained for some moments in thought.

'I had hoped it would be otherwise,' he said, slowly. 'I had hoped that my presence might recal some lingering recollection of the past, and revive some memories that had slumbered with absence. It is for you to decide. For worlds I would not coerce you. Bid me set you free, and your own lips give you the freedom you desire. Yet, pardon me, while I remind you that freedom is not the only secret of happiness in this world. There is a yoke that is freer than freedom, and there is a yielding of the will in things temporal

that has ere-now been welcomed as a glad release from the servitude of self-guidance.'

Gabrielle's glance was busy with the carpet of withered verdure at her feet ; yet her tightly-clasped hands proved that she was not insensible to the force of the suggestion.

'It is too late,' she murmured. 'Voluntarily, I might have welcomed the bondage of which you speak. As a passive victim, I can only rebel, and cast from me the chains which have pressed me so terribly. It is a proof of your own nobleness that you have never once accused me of having forged them. Like yourself, I was a victim. Let us now be free, and part truer friends in our mutual freedom than ever we have been in our captivity.'

Captain Kearney hesitated. He walked up and down the narrow forest pathway for some moments as if in doubt and perplexity. At length he came and stood in front of her once more, and said gravely, and in a constrained voice,

'It shall be as you say. Henceforth we are friends, but no more than friends—sincere friends, I hope and believe. One wish I may give utterance to, before the final severance of the tie that has bound us;—may you find in "freedom" the happiness I had ventured to hope you would have found in a glad and free subjection to a will whose aim was co-ordinate with your own.'

He paused, as if waiting for a response. But there was none. He extended his hand, and Gabrielle laid within it her own, cold and trembling, in spite of herself. It was pressed for one instant, then abruptly released, and Gabrielle felt, rather than saw, that he had left her, and that she was now, at last and for ever,—free!

CHAPTER XXIV.

Compelled to exclaim,
As Brutus did to Virtue, 'Liberty,
I worshipped thee, and find thee but a shade!'

The Excursion.

'FREE! free! is there any boon in this tyrannical world like the boon of unbounded freedom?'

Thus mused Gabrielle Hope, as she still loitered amid the pine trees, after the last, far-off sound of Frank Kearney's footsteps had died upon her ear. It was marvellously still around. A low murmuring of ocean billows, a weird, wailing sound of wind among the pine wood, the rustle of a lizard or a wood-mouse amid the dead fronds of last year's fern,—sounds that might assist, but could not distract reflection—yet truly Gabrielle needed no incentive to thought.

The goal, the long-desired goal, had at last been attained. The fetters that had cramped her spirit had fallen from her. Why did not that spirit rebound in ecstasy at its own release, as she had so often imagined would be the case? Was it because, in this world, fulfilment never realises anticipation? Because 'man never is, but always to be, blest?' Was she indeed in the enjoyment of unspeakable bliss, without being able to bring that bliss to the test of sensation? If so, where was the use of being happy in this world! It was easy enough to test the reality of suffering. Was there no corresponding guarantee of the reality of joy? Oh, this weary disappointing world! We labour, we strive, we yearn, we pray for a draught of refreshing elixir, we reach it through toil and weariness, fears and faintings, and it proves but the mirage in the desert, and blisters the longing lips, mocks at the cleaving tongue.

'And is there no such thing,' mused Gabrielle, 'as sensible freedom in this world? Yes—there is the glorious law of liberty—there is the freedom wherewith

Christ has made us free; but wherein consists that liberty? In the "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Captivity again! No freedom but in subjection! Ah! but to Whom? Such a yoke may well be easy, such a burthen may well be light. Yet it has been said, "be subject one to another,"—but this again is in a wider sense, Christian humility—"I am among you as he that serveth."

Then, with an overwhelming effect, came the thought of that beautiful type of Christian domestic life, in the relation of the Church to her divine Head. The freedom of the Church, her supreme liberty, consisted in unqualified submission to the Will of her Lord. The subjection of the wife had been for ever sanctified by the divine comparison. The yoke of the husband was no longer the stern 'he shall rule over thee,' but the wise guidance of one who 'loveth and cherisheth even as the Lord the Church.'

Was this what she had but now rejected? Oh! who could say! In how many instances had the husband's tyranny caused the wife's despair! Where could be found the wisdom, free from all self-seeking, to which a wife might yield unqualified submission? Was it not better to be free, free from all wrangling, contention and bitterness, even though denied the pleasure of sympathy, reverence, and cheerful dependence. He, who had just quitted her, was one who would be all or nothing. She had read that in his eye when first she scanned his countenance. In his own household he would be 'lord of all,' a wise lord, perchance, but she was not prepared to admit the position. At Heatherbrae she was herself 'lord of all,' and had hitherto found the title sweet. Yet, strange to say, even Heatherbrae, and its unlimited monarchy, partook just now of the universal dead-leaf colouring that had overspread the blue of her horizon. Even the moorland breeze felt keen and chilly in remembrance. Her lilies and narcissus—those carefully tended borders; what were they but strips of soil and pretty blossoms?—blooming but for her own gratification, over which no one, unless it

might be little Aileen, would hang with pleasure and sympathy akin to her own. Then the poor of that wild district—her grandfather's legacy to her—here was an object, an aim, for the active portion of her life, but how could she hope to deal wisely by that lawless population with no better guide than innocent Mr. Wheeler, who shook his head despairingly over the black sheep of his flock, and embraced the scanty remnant with indiscriminating affection and confidence.

So this was to be the end of all. The prospect had appeared pleasant enough at a distance; why should it seem less so now that it was fast becoming a reality? Had imagination invested it with tints that proved upon investigation to be delusive? Gabrielle shrank from the bare suggestion. A few weeks ago, life at Heatherbrae, with only a faithful attendant, had seemed pleasant enough. Since then, a sister had been given to her loneliness. Aileen's slight, unobtrusive figure must have its place in every vision of Gabrielle's future. So long, at least, as no other home claimed her for its own. And here a dreary thought obtruded itself. Imagination pictured the day when a closer tie would draw Aileen from her sister's side, and fancy rambled on to another fireside than Heatherbrae—to some face, features unknown, which looked into Aileen's with protecting tenderness, and towards which Aileen raised her soft brown eyes with trustful, confiding affection. That truant fancy pictured, further, little Aileens, with bright dark eyes, who encircled the happy ones by the fireside, and on whom the gaze of the parents dwelt with pride and full contentment. And then arose another vision—a vision of a solitary being, seated beside a solitary hearth, in a solitary home—occupying herself with self-imposed tasks—sharing the external joys and sorrows of other happy hearths, but first with none—necessary to none.

'It is a common lot, after all,' soliloquised Gabrielle, as she stifled a sigh, and began to retrace her steps. 'It has been a blessed lot often, ere now—but then—but then, it has been chosen for its own sake, not

accepted as an unavoidable necessity. I am not choosing it for its own sake, no—I accept it as a preferable alternative to yielding up my freedom to one who has never been in a position to choose me freely—for my own sake. A single, devoted life is the highest of all, but then it must be embraced from choice, and from the purest of all motives. Time may purify my motives—may sanctify my aims. Meanwhile, I must be content “rather in all to be resigned than blest.” Heatherbrae, and my quiet country life, will wear a new aspect when once this time of agitation is over. I shall regain the healthy tone of mind I have lately enjoyed, and look back upon this visit as one looks back upon a time of sickness, with wonder that one could bear it so calmly while it lasted, and with an earnest thanksgiving for a complete recovery.’

When she reached the house, she found Aileen on the watch for her, solicitous about her absence at luncheon time, and with a cup of tea ready at a moment’s notice, which Gabrielle did not now despise. A good fire was burning, and the day was not so warm as to make a fire unacceptable. Gabrielle threw aside her hat, and listened contentedly to Aileen’s lively description of her expedition to the sands.

But her depression returned when, after a while, Aileen was forced to make the unwelcome suggestion that it was time to dress for dinner. She showed no solicitude this evening about her toilet, and when Aileen produced the elegant silk dress, the latest importation from town, she put it on without even a remark.

There was no occasion to avoid meeting the countenances in the drawing-room to-night. Mrs. Pierrepont, anxious to atone for any little unpleasantness the morning’s discussion might have left, seized her niece affectionately, and overwhelmed her with questions relative to her first impressions of Bournemouth. Emma Mostyn and Mr. Charles Oldfield joined in the conversation.

‘Did you enjoy your ramble this morning, Gabrielle?’ asked her cousin. ‘I saw you take the direction of the

plantation; and as you seemed bent upon a solitary expedition, and, moreover, it was nearly luncheon time, I did not offer to accompany you.'

'The pine-wood is very pleasant,' said Gabrielle.

'Yes, with a cheerful companion, but a dolorous place otherwise. We walked on the sands this morning. The tide was low, and the footing tolerably firm, which is not always the case here.'

'The sea was calm this morning,' observed Mr. Oldfield, by way of saying something.

'Yes, and very blue,' added Emma, 'and the white cliffs of the Needles were glistening like silver in the sunshine. Really, Gabrielle, I had no idea till lately how infectious a poetic temperament may be. When I am in your neighbourhood I always find myself talking in blank verse.'

'I think you are less prosaic than you used to be, Emma.'

'I appreciate the compliment, knowing that I have thereby risen tenfold in your estimation. I hope I shall rise still further when I tell you that I discovered a spot to-day from which your friend, Captain Kearney, made a most charming sketch of the bourne and bay, with a villa or two for foreground.'

'By the by,' observed Mrs. Pierrepont, 'what has become of Captain Kearney? I have not seen him since breakfast time. Did you say he was sketching with you this morning, Emma?'

'Yes, we rambled over the sands, and then discovered the point from which Captain Kearney made this pretty sketch. Did you know he was such a good draughtsman, Gabrielle?'

'Yes,' said Gabrielle, slowly. 'I remember he used to sketch well when——when I knew him before.'

'But where can he have been all day?' repeated Mrs. Pierrepont. 'Did he come in to luncheon with you, Emma?'

'He came home with me, but he did not appear at luncheon time. I really do not know what became of him.'

'Nor you, Gabrielle? Have none of you seen him since?'

'Yes, I have seen him since luncheon,' said Gabrielle, with a mighty effort. 'He is not here now—he is gone. I thought he must have wished you good-bye.'

'Gone!' exclaimed Mrs. Pierrepont.

'Gone!' re-echoed Emma. 'Are you quite certain, Gabrielle?'

'Yes, I am quite certain,' said Gabrielle, quietly.

'But how do you know? Did he tell you he was going? Did he say good-bye to you?' persisted Emma.

'Yes; at least, I understood him to say he was going. I believe he said good-bye,' said Gabrielle.

'I am glad, at all events, that you are not quite positive, cousin mine,' said Emma, in so peculiar a tone that Gabrielle involuntarily turned round, and found Captain Kearney standing quietly behind her chair, where neither Mrs. Pierrepont nor herself were likely to have observed him.

'I thought you could not have left without bidding us good-bye,' said Mrs. Pierrepont laughing, while Gabrielle despised herself for the sudden lightness that had fallen upon her spirit, and devoutly wished it had been possible to recal her own observations.

'Certainly not,' said Captain Kearney, courteously. 'I must plead guilty to having been a truant this afternoon. I strolled over the cliffs as far as Branksome, and you will be glad to hear, Miss Mostyn, that I discovered several points from which a sketch would be very effective.'

'Oh! I am very glad indeed. I am myself longing to reach Branksome. I think we could make up a walking party to-morrow. Miss Lucy Hamilton is an excellent walker.'

'But you are not a good walker, Emma,' said Colonel Mostyn. 'I am sure you would never be equal to a walk to Branksome. You and I can take a carriage and drive there, and your cousin Gabrielle too, if she

will accompany us, and we shall be there long before the walking party.'

'Oh! no, papa, I feel so invigorated by the sea breezes that I am sure I could walk any distance. I would not miss the sea view for the world, and the drive by the road is so particularly uninteresting.'

'I will drive with you, uncle Henry,' said Gabrielle.

'So you shall, Gabrielle; and depend upon it, Emma will be glad enough to return home in the carriage. She has not taken a walk of more than a mile since we were at Kettlebury with you last autumn.'

'I never feel strong enough inland,' said Emma, 'but the seaside is quite a different matter. Besides, I am going to entreat Captain Kearney to give me some lessons in sketching from nature. I used to learn drawing at school, and was always passionately fond of it.'

'I never knew you sketched anything but heads in crayon,' said Colonel Mostyn.

'That was my forte, certainly; but one kind of drawing assists you in all other kinds, I believe. Is not that the case, Captain Kearney?'

'I really cannot say. I never handled a crayon, or sketched a head in my life.'

'Why do not you take up sketching again, Gabrielle?' asked her aunt. 'Your pencil sketches used to be admirable.'

'The little I ever attempted I gave up long ago,' said Gabrielle. 'I have no talent for drawing.'

'It is of no use attempting it unless you have quite a passion for it,' observed Emma.

'I never had a passion for it,' said Gabrielle.

'I don't know what you may mean by "a passion" for it,' said Mrs. Pierrepont, 'but I do know, Gabrielle, that you used to be drawing morning, noon and night some four or five years ago.'

'I suppose I had nothing better to do,' said Gabrielle, carelessly.

'Captain Kearney must show me his sketches,' observed Mrs. Pierrepont. 'I had no idea he was such a clever artist.'

Dinner was announced, and Gabrielle resignedly accepted the arm of her companion of the previous day, not without a fear that his stock of original observations had already been exhausted.

Day after day passed by, and Gabrielle could not but marvel that Captain Kearney's visit showed no sign of reaching a termination. She knew not for what period of time he had been invited, but she for some time daily expected to hear that his engagements summoned him elsewhere. His presence occasioned her no annoyance, for he had quietly and at once settled into the position of an ordinary acquaintance, and, while studiously courteous, never sought her society, never attempted to draw her into conversation, never obtruded his attentions, nor appeared to watch her movements. He was a pleasant companion, genial and well-informed, but whereas Emma Mostyn and Miss Lucy Hamilton exerted themselves to be agreeable to so rare an acquisition to their society, Gabrielle silently retired more and more from their companionship, and found solace in a lonely walk, or a ramble with Aileen, or, not unfrequently, in a drive with her uncle and aunt.

At first she felt grateful to Captain Kearney for avoiding all unnecessary intercourse, but after a time, so perverse is human nature, a feeling of wounded pride and self-love gained the mastery. It would, indeed, have been bad taste to pursue her with attentions she had once rejected, but need he, at the same time, have forgotten that the last words that passed between them had been words of friendship and esteem? How could he regard her as a friend, and yet reserve his most lively remarks and his choicest sketches for Emma and Lucy, who till lately had been perfect strangers to him? This wounded feeling gathered strength day by day, until it resolved itself into a fervent wish that Captain Kearney's engagements would press upon him a little more urgently, and take him away altogether from Bournemouth, and the blandishments of Emma Mostyn.

Yet she had no just cause for complaint, and herein lay the grievance. To have treated him with coldness or

pique would have been an utter breach of good taste. So she was driven, perforce, to acquiesce in their existing relation to one another, and to watch Mrs. Pierrepont's friendly efforts to further Emma's views, from a standing point of strict neutrality.

Before long, a fresh source of annoyance sprang up. Emma's curiosity had been considerably aroused by the appearance of Gabrielle's pretty young companion; and by means of hints, and inuendos, and suggestions that she knew more than might appear, she had succeeded in extracting the truth from Mrs. Pierrepont.

Gabrielle soon suspected that Emma guessed her secret. She cared for this but little, as she was resolved to proclaim the mystery of Aileen's birth to all the world, as soon as she returned to Heatherbrae. But it annoyed her that Emma should criticise her companion before Captain Kearney and Lucy Hamilton, and that her private arrangements should be made matters of curiosity and speculation.

A wet day kept all the party within doors. Mrs. Pierrepont amused herself with a novel, while the other ladies were busy or idle, as the case might be, over various pieces of needlework. Captain Kearney was working up one of the rough sketches he had lately been making, and Mr. Charles Oldfield roamed from the window to the fire-place, and from the fire-place to the window, and occasionally held a skein of wool for Miss Hamilton to wind. Before long, however, the latter gentleman found his occupation rather wanting in excitement, and strolled off, as he said, to the reading room, but more probably, as Emma whispered to Lucy, in search of a billiard table.

Emma was making up a pair of very pretty fire-screens, of which the centre was a water-colour sketch, taken by Captain Kearney, and the border composed of beads and fringe.

'I intended these screens, in the first instance, as a wedding gift for a friend,' she remarked, presently, 'but while I have been making them up, I have become so enamoured of them, that I think I shall be obliged to

keep them myself, and purchase a present for my friend, instead.'

'They are very pretty,' said Lucy.

'Yes, and will serve as a souvenir of this pleasant visit to Bournemouth. Now, a book-stand or portfolio will convey just as much gratification to my friend, but would be utterly valueless to me.'

'Do you indulge in souvenirs of places and persons, Miss Mostyn?' asked Captain Kearney. 'Believe me, after a time, they give more pain than pleasure. They either recal friends and scenes that are no more, or you have to destroy them because they have ceased to represent anything.'

'Ah! that may be the case with gentlemen's keepsakes,' said Emma, 'but ladies are not so fleeting. A friend once is a friend for ever, eh, Gabrielle?'

'I am not sure that I am prepared to endorse that opinion,' said Gabrielle, quietly.

'No, nor any one else,' said Captain Kearney, 'nothing is so mutable as friendship—unless it may be love.'

'O, Captain Kearney! what a shocking statement!' exclaimed Lucy. 'I am sure you cannot mean that!'

'But if a few selected souvenirs are likely to cause pain, how harrowing must such a book as yours be, Gabrielle, after the lapse of a few years!' observed Emma. 'You must know, Lucy, that my cousin has a scrap book, in which all her friends write their sentiments.'

'Their sentiments towards Miss Hope, do you mean?' asked Lucy.

'Not necessarily, although I believe such manifestations of affection are not excluded. Has F. K. contributed anything lately, Gabrielle?'

Whether the shaft was pointed innocently or intentionally, Gabrielle never knew. Happily she was mistress of herself, and the mass of dark brown curls that bent over the drawing-paper never stirred.

'I have had many contributions since you were with me,' she said, in a clear, cheerful tone. 'But I cannot undertake to repeat them for your amusement. Dr.

Arnold Blyth, amongst others, has left his own character on my pages.'

'Dr. Blyth—the good-looking young doctor—do you see much of him?'

'I have seen a great deal of him this winter.'

'I thought no gentleman below the age of Mr. Wheeler was allowed to enter the sisterhood at Heatherbrae.'

'The sisterhood at Heatherbrae has laid down no limitation as to age, that I am aware of.'

'At all events, when Miss Tudor left you, you could not well receive gentlemen visitors.'

'Why not?'

'Well—I don't exactly know why not,' said Emma, 'but I believe it is not generally considered "the thing."'

'I must come to you for enlightenment as to what "the thing" may mean.'

'Every one knows that.'

'I do not, and I fear I may very often be transgressing the unknown "thing" through ignorance.'

'I believe you are a law to yourself, my good Gabrielle, and any hints of mine upon etiquette would be thrown away upon you.'

'Etiquette, strictly so called, has not yet penetrated to the wilds of Kettlebury. We are content with the rustic substitute of "good feeling."'

'Is Miss Tudor likely to return to Heatherbrae?'

'I am not sure.'

'I knew of an exceedingly well-informed elderly lady who would have suited you exactly, Gabrielle, a short time ago. She was in search of a situation as friend and companion.'

'Ah! yes, indeed!' said Mrs. Pierrepont, who had just reached the end of her volume, and had but a vague idea of what the conversation had been. 'Those paid companions are very hard to get—that is to say, desirable ones. Some are so obtrusively familiar, and some so unrefined—it is hardly possible to obtain what you require.'

'Yet surely the companions are sometimes very much to be pitied,' said Captain Kearney.

'I daresay they are,' said Mrs. Pierrepont, 'but then, you know, they are handsomely paid for anything they have to endure.'

'I heard of a most curious case the other day,' said Emma. 'A young heiress, clever, beautiful, and accomplished, &c., engaged a young companion. The heiress was an orphan, with few relatives, and lived by herself. She grew very fond of this young girl, and treated her almost as an equal,—and who do you suppose this girl turned out to be?'

'Another great heiress,' suggested Lucy.

'No—she turned out to be her sister—her father's daughter.'

'Now, what should you have done in such a case?' asked Mrs. Pierrepont.

'I should have sent her somewhere to be educated,' said Emma.

'But no education at that age can produce refinement,' said Mrs. Pierrepont. 'And consider the antecedents!'

'What were the antecedents?' demanded Gabrielle, stifling her annoyance.

'Well, my love, suppose we say a poor but respectable mother, an absence of society, and, probably, a previous life spent in menial occupations.'

'I think I should have made her a handsome allowance, and found her a comfortable home somewhere or other,' said Lucy.

'Or married her out of hand to the first husband who offered,' said Emma, 'and have done one's duty by her in the shape of a substantial dowry and an elegant trousseau.'

'You have said nothing, Captain Kearney,' observed Mrs. Pierrepont, who thought the opinion of Gabrielle's friend might carry some weight with Gabrielle. 'Now let us hear what you would expect the young heiress to do in such a case.'

'I should expect her, first of all,' said Captain Kearney,

‘to go down on her knees and return thanks for the gift of a sister.’

He spoke without raising his head, and consequently missed the sudden glance of grateful sympathy which Gabrielle involuntarily flashed upon him. Those words fell like balm upon her jaded spirit. Mrs. Pierrepont, discomfited, relapsed into silence, and Emma changed the conversation. Gabrielle regained her wonted serenity, and under her influence the conversation gradually assumed a higher tone.

CHAPTER XXV.

For reasons not to love him once I sought,
And wearied all my thought
To vex myself and him.—*W. S. Landon.*

A SORT of picnic excursion to the little village of M—— had been planned for some days, and at length a fine breezy morning inspired all the projectors with a desire of carrying out their scheme. The distance was too great for the ladies to walk both ways, so Mrs. Pierrepont and Colonel Mostyn agreed to drive to the same point, with the provisions, and all the party were to be driven home.

The walk over the sands was pleasant enough, although most of the party were somewhat tired when they reached the appointed trysting place. Gabrielle felt weary, it must be confessed, less with her exertions than with listening to the vapid conversation of Mr. Charles Oldfield, who appeared, by universal consent, to be looked upon as her inevitable cavalier. Perhaps on this occasion some allowance was to be made for the inanity of his remarks, for he was naturally delicate, and the long walk over heavy sand, beneath a scorching sun, so over-

came him that when they reached M—— he was fain to stretch himself under such shelter as he could obtain, faint and exhausted, and unfit for any further exertion that day.

This *contre-temps* would have signified little, but for another and more serious one. When Colonel Mostyn and the carriage arrived, he announced that Mrs. Pierrepont had felt so exceedingly unwell that she had decided upon returning home, when within a mile of her destination; but she thought there would be room for all the ladies in Colonel Mostyn's carriage, and that the gentlemen would not object to the return walk.

The ladies exchanged glances of some consternation as they received this message, and contemplated their prostrate companion, whose exhaustion was only relieved by the administration of brandy, and to whom the walk home was manifestly a physical impossibility.

'I am an excellent walker,' said Gabrielle, cheerfully. 'Mr. Oldfield shall take my place in the carriage, and I am sure I am equal to the walk home.'

'So am I,' said Emma. 'In this exhilarating air I can do anything.'

The matter being thus arranged, preparations for luncheon commenced in good earnest. Mrs. Pierrepont's idea of entertainments *al fresco* was rather too punctilious for genuine enjoyment, and when, amongst other refinements of polite life, table-napkins made their appearance, there was a general laugh.

'The march of civilisation can scarcely carry us much further in refinement than the point we are arrived at,' said Captain Kearney. 'What would be the feelings of a modern lady or gentleman if they were transported back a few hundred years for a meal?'

'Oh, it would be charming!' said Emma. 'Simplicity can never conceal true refinement, and there might be as much high breeding and good taste in a hall strewn with fresh rushes, as in a carpeted saloon.'

'Might be, only unfortunately there used not to be,' said Captain Kearney. 'Picture to yourself the times, Miss Mostyn, when each guest brought his own knife,

which he cleaned on his own garment; it being considered a sign of exceptional politeness if he avoided using his neighbour's robe for the purpose.'

'Of course there have been low and vulgar persons in all ages.'

'Yes; but this was no proof of vulgarity. A rule for good breeding was laid down for the carver, which was that he should never set on fish, flesh, or fowl more than two fingers and a thumb. Having no plates, they used slices of bread for the purpose, ate with their fingers, and threw the waste pieces to cats and dogs hovering round the table.'

'Oh, Captain Kearney, how can you say such dreadful things!' exclaimed Lucy Hamilton—'wicked libels made up by those who wish to depreciate the dear old past.'

'Indeed I speak in sober earnest,' said Captain Kearney. 'We need not go very far back for what you call "wicked libels." I was reading the other day an account of a dinner-party that took place only a century and a half ago, at a nobleman's residence. The hostess carved, and laughed and joked with the footman, and a fashionable gentleman helped the fritters with his hands out of the dish.'

'Well, I don't think I shall ever again wish that I had lived in the days of the Crusaders,' said Lucy.

'No, indeed; the past is always surrounded by a halo, but in many more ways than in the matter of plates and knives and forks, we may be thankful for living when we do, rather than some centuries back.'

'At the same time,' said Gabrielle, 'it is a great mistake to be dependent upon luxuries—table-napkins for example.'

'Yes, we may push refinement too far, as the Athenians did—and the result will be enervation and effeminacy.'

The repast ended, Captain Kearney sat down to take a sketch of the still distant Isle of Wight, and Emma, as a matter of course, also produced her sketch-book.

Miss Mostyn's productions were a mere parody upon sketching. She was sublimely indifferent to rules of perspective, light and shade, foreground and distance. With her a hill was a hill, a shore a shore, a space of ultramarine occupied the place of a sea, and the soft tints that gently veiled the distant island were as firm and clear as those that adorned the fisher's skiff drawn up upon the shore by her side. Captain Kearney used good-naturedly to brush up these 'landscapes,' as she called them, wash out the vivid distance, wash in the pallid foreground; and Emma, who unscrupulously regarded the result as her own performance, professed herself charmed with the progress she was making under such able tuition, and produced her block and colour-box whenever an opportunity presented itself.

At length Colonel Mostyn announced that it was time to return home. Gabrielle accordingly gathered up her skirts, and bidding adieu to the carriage party, began to walk homewards, having previously resolved to leave Captain Kearney and Emma to the undisturbed enjoyment of each other's society.

The sand was very heavy and retarded her progress, and nearly a quarter of an hour elapsed before her solitude was invaded. She had imagined that Emma's tardy footsteps would never overtake her more rapid movements until it should please her to lessen her pace, and she was not a little astonished at being thus easily overtaken; but her astonishment ceased when, on turning round, she found that Captain Kearney alone was following her, and that her cousin was nowhere upon the scene.

'Has Emma also been seized with a sudden attack of illness?'

'No; but Colonel Mostyn raised a protest at the last moment, and forbade his daughter attempting the walk. And I must say I think he was right. I fear it is beyond the strength of any lady, and I am sorry you should have attempted it.'

'It is not beyond my strength,' said Gabrielle, de-

cisively, 'although I think it may perhaps have been beyond Emma's.'

As she spoke she made a vigorous effort, for Captain Kearney had slackened his pace to suit hers, and she was resolved that the *tête-à-tête* walk should occupy as short a space of time as might be. A disagreeable recollection of a *tête-à-tête* walk with another gentleman, over Kettlebury Common by moonlight, came into her mind; and the thought lent strength to her somewhat failing powers, and enabled her for some time to keep up with her companion's rapid and easy step.

But she need not have taken alarm. Captain Kearney's manner was as free from all embarrassment, as free from all apparent self-recollection, as if Lucy Hamilton had been his companion instead of Gabrielle Hope. His conversation, always lively, was more entertaining than usual. He was well stored with anecdotes of foreign travel, had made a good use of his eyes, and was sufficiently well-read to have appreciated to the full the associations of the places he had visited. He made no further comment upon his companion's powers of endurance, but when, upon one occasion, Gabrielle stumbled, and he offered his arm with the most matter-of-fact politeness, it was rejected, almost indignantly, and the offer was not repeated.

And so poor Gabrielle, sustained by her indomitable will, pressed forward, but already she felt she had miscalculated her strength. On a firm road, or even on the flinty pathways of her own common, she was capable of walking great distances without much fatigue; but the heavy sand, which offered no resistance to the tread, and in which every step forward was half a step back, soon began to tell upon her power of endurance. The walk in the morning had been a long and a fatiguing one, and the pace at which Captain Kearney was now striding homewards was not that which she would have chosen for her own comfort. Still she pressed onward. She could not endure that the walk, which he was apparently desirous of shortening, should be prolonged through any physical weakness on her part. Happily she

was spared all necessity of conversing, for it would have been an impossibility to utter more than a gasping sentence in her present state of breathlessness. To add to the discomfort of the journey, the wind, which had aided their progress in the morning, now impeded them at every step, and blew the sand in their faces, until even Captain Kearney was glad to make a veil of his pocket-handkerchief.

In some moods Gabrielle would have made mirth of this ludicrous combination of miseries, but she was in no mirthful humour now, and even had she been so, she still felt that the past was too real for any light or jocose conversation to pass between herself and Captain Kearney.

He probably felt the same, if such an inference might be drawn from his studious avoidance of any topic that could become in the least degree personal to either. Gabrielle could not but admire the skill with which he allowed his conversation to drift from one subject to another, each interesting in its turn, each capable of only a general application, affording a greater insight into the facts of his past life than she had ever before obtained, yet absolutely free from all intrusion of self. Could mind have subdued matter, Gabrielle's weary limbs would have held out to the last; but alas! step by step she flagged and drooped; again and again, her spirit rose to meet the emergency, and she pushed forward energetically for a few paces, but again and again exhaustion overcame her, and at last she was forced to ejaculate, in all the bitterness of failure, 'I can go no further,' and with the words she sank on the sand where she stood, overwhelmed with fatigue.

Above all things she had dreaded commiseration, but no such trial awaited her. Captain Kearney seated himself near, as if it was the most natural thing in the world to rest awhile in the course of such an arduous undertaking, and drawing the inevitable sketch-book out of his pocket, began roughly to make a draught of a green combe caused by an opening in the rocks near which they were seated.

Shall it be confessed that his very composure was irritating to Gabrielle?—she knew not why. Solicitude on his part would have offended her: had he stridden onwards and left her to her fate, she would have accused him, not unreasonably, of discourteousness and want of chivalric feeling. He had done neither, and she felt provoked. She felt a contempt for herself, because she found her seat on the sands so comfortable, and because she could remain and rest there without disquietude so long as that aggravating pencil moved to and fro over the paper, and the head rose and fell as the outline of brook and bank were transferred to the picture. Everything was out of tune: the sand was blinding, the wind keen, the sea looked dark and chilly, the sky was louring. Bournemouth was still distant, the afternoon was wearing on, and the thought of the treacherous sand was more disheartening than ever.

At length the pencil paused, and Gabrielle instantly rose. Captain Kearney put his drawing materials in his pocket, and then again offered his arm with as much composure as though it had only been laid aside during the interval of rest. Gabrielle no longer declined it, for to do so would have been mere braggadocio in her state of palpable exhaustion; and oh! base humiliation! before many minutes had elapsed she found herself, in spite of herself, clinging desperately to that stout arm, by the aid of which, alone, she contrived to drag along her weary frame.

But Captain Kearney was merciful. If his keen penetration told him that the proud heart had been forced to succumb, no word or look, no gesture or motion betrayed the fact. He had indeed altered his pace to suit her needs, but he pushed onwards as manfully as ever, as though no additional hindrance arrested his progress. He recollected some amusing adventures which had befallen a friend of his, when travelling on the Continent, and he made them still more amusing by his lively word-painting—the houses, costumes, manners of the people concerned were so vividly described that Gabrielle could almost have fancied she had herself been

on the spot. From that he passed on to a description of St. Peter's at Rome. He had been in Rome on one occasion, on the morning of Easter day, when the Pope blessed the city and the world (*urbi et orbi*) from the grand gallery in the front of St. Peter's; the solemnity of the scene, the sudden roar of the cannons of the castle of San Angelo, the kneeling multitude, the profound silence, and the thrice-repeated benediction had made a vast impression on his mind. He had seen the Pope attend high mass at St. Peter's, and described vividly the appearance of the venerable prelate, attended by his officials in gorgeous apparel, the dignitaries of the Church, the Swiss Guard, and the vast numbers assembled to gaze and adore. He had heard and appreciated the surpassing melody of the finest choir in the world. He had visited Naples soon after an eruption of Vesuvius, and had stood on the lava deposit till his feet were almost scorched, to get as near a view as possible of the awful crater. He had roamed on foot through the Tyrol, and heard the *yodel* of the Bavarian highlander, and passed through the gaming saloons of Baden;—and then, just as Gabrielle's pulse began to beat more quickly, feeling that he was on the verge of dangerous ground, he turned calmly aside to the lakes of Lucerne, Constance, and Geneva, and the now well-known ascents of Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa.

But when nature has been over-taxed, she is not to be cheated of her revenge, or charmed by a pleasant voice and a lively narration. Fatigue pressed sorely on Gabrielle. But for that muscular arm she must again and again have dropped fainting by the way. Indeed, at length, even this support proved insufficient, and, withdrawing her hand, she again sank upon the sand, utterly exhausted.

'It is of no use,' she gasped. 'You must go on without me, Captain Kearney. I will crawl home by degrees. I am not afraid, and there are still some hours before night. But if life depended upon it, I could not walk another step at present. Pray leave me and go home.'

'I shall not leave you, Miss Hope,' said Captain Kearney, quietly; 'but, as you say, there is time enough and to spare. Are you not afraid of taking cold? The wind is keen and you are very lightly clad. Perhaps you will not object to wrap this round your throat,' and as he spoke he drew a fresh white silk handkerchief out of his pocket. 'It is not much, but it is all I have to offer you, and certainly better than nothing.'

'Indeed I do not require it,' exclaimed Gabrielle, hastily. 'I am not cold—at least, not particularly cold.'

The handkerchief, nevertheless, was silently dropped in her lap, and then Captain Kearney observed that he was going to see whether his juvenile talent for building sand-castles had forsaken him. Gabrielle could hardly help smiling at the zest with which he turned up his coat-sleeves and plunged his hands into the sand, even over the white wristbands.

A sand-castle was erected—keep, donjon, and moat complete—which would have rejoiced the heart of a nine-year-old; and meanwhile Gabrielle watched the work silently, and pondered over the character which could throw itself thus ardently into a childish pastime. When it was finished, Captain Kearney eyed it from a distance with some satisfaction.

'A creditable performance, really. I don't believe I could have done it better in the days of frocks and curls. Now if some young rebel should venture thus far from his nurse's apron-string to-morrow, he will be rewarded for his insubordination. It is above high tide.'

'Are you ready?' asked Gabrielle, preparing to rise, with somewhat of a sigh.

'Presently; but I must first endeavour to wash my hands without wetting my feet, and I believe this to be possible. Bournemouth waves are not impetuous.'

Having washed his hands, and dried them in the handkerchief which he had fastened round his hat as a veil, he again offered his arm, but Gabrielle drew back.

'If you will allow me, I will try to walk alone. I think I can do so.'

'Impossible.'

'You cannot support your own weight and mine too. No one could do so through this dreadful sand; and if I take your arm I cannot help dragging you back. I shall only make you as tired as I am myself.'

'You have not tired me yet.'

'I fear you are too polite to say so.'

'No, I am not polite. When you have tired me I will tell you so.'

Gabrielle had no alternative but to accept the arm which was still proffered. She pushed on once more, but much as she might endeavour to support her own weight, and she did endeavour sincerely, she always found her companion a step in advance of her, and herself resting on his arm. But the arm did its work well. It never faltered nor flinched, and so by-and-by the pitiless sand was left behind, a firmer footing reached, and at last—oh! welcome sight!—Mr. Pierrepont's house broke upon Gabrielle's anxious gaze, and she knew that the ordeal was over.

As they crossed the threshold, Captain Kearney's reticence expired. 'I fear you are, indeed, dreadfully tired.'

Her spirit would fain have revived for a parting gleam. She was on the point of saying, 'Tired, but not dreadfully,' when a more magnanimous influence crept over her. 'I am tired,' she said, quietly. 'I miscalculated my strength. I believe I have to thank you that I am not now seated on the sand half-way home.'

'I am glad if I have been of service to you,' he replied, briefly; and then, passing out of sight, Gabrielle crawled wearily and painfully to her own room, allowed Aileen to assist her to bed, and appeared downstairs no more that day.

CHAPTER XXVI.

By stealth she passed, and fled as fast
As doth the hunted fawn ;
Nor stopped, till in the dappling east
Appeared unwelcome dawn.—*Wordsworth.*

GABRIELLE could not help perceiving that, since her residence at Bournemouth, Aileen's spirits had been less evenly cheerful than had been the case at Heatherbrae. The thought occasioned her much pain. She had known that Aileen must lead a comparatively lonely life in a house where she would be forced to give up a great deal of her own time to the claims of society and of her relatives; but she hoped that her tender display of affection to her young sister, and the change of air and scene, might have made a month pass away not unpleasantly, even under such circumstances.

But Aileen was evidently pining for Home and Heatherbrae. Though no word of complaint passed her lips, she always alluded to both with a yearning longing that was sufficiently evident to her sister's watchful ear. She knew that Gabrielle could not be so entirely her own anywhere as at Heatherbrae; and while she strove with all her power to be unselfish, yet her every thought and hope was so bound up with her sister, that it was scarcely possible to be insensible to the pain of seeing her so seldom, and of finding her, during those brief intervals, often silent and abstracted, listless and depressed.

Gabrielle herself was torn by conflicting desires. Her stay at Bournemouth was undeniably painful to her, yet she felt no wish to depart. She admitted, sorrowfully enough, that the recollection of Heatherbrae was no longer flooded with the golden sunshine that had hitherto enveloped it. Bournemouth was vexatious, the thought of London was unendurable, yet the peaceful life at Heatherbrae no longer presented a panacea

for these ills, and altogether the future looked vague, cheerless, unsatisfactory.

It was in some such mood as this that she left the drawing-room one morning to stroll round the garden, out of hearing of Emma's pretty speeches, Lucy's idle prattle, and the sight of Captain Kearney's everlasting colour-box.

The garden was small, but tastefully laid out. As she passed the study window, Colonel Mostyn caught sight of her, and appeared inspired with a sudden desire for her society, for he immediately rose and joined her.

'You are very fond of walking alone, Gabrielle. I suppose you will tell me "Never less alone than when alone;" but I don't think it is quite natural at your age. Emma, on the contrary, is never happy but in society. She cannot endure her own company, and I often think her life at home with me must be very dull.'

'I never heard Emma say so, Uncle Henry.'

'No, she is a very good girl, and has been a good daughter. I cannot, of course, expect to keep her with me always, but I shall try not to let my own selfish interests interfere with her happiness.'

'Always supposing that it should be for her happiness to leave you.'

'Just so; I am not one of those who think matrimony a *sine quâ non* of existence. At the same time a father with one only daughter is naturally anxious to see her provided with a wise protector before he is himself removed from her side.'

'Perhaps so,' said Gabrielle, marvelling much what might be the drift of such a speech.

'And this anxiety on Emma's account has induced me to speak to you to-day. You are of course much interested in your cousin's welfare, and you cannot but have observed the preference your friend Captain Kearney shows for Emma's society. The mere fact of his being a friend of yours inclines me to think of him favourably; but I need not tell you, Gabrielle, that

there are more substantial considerations than amiability and good manners which a father is bound to remember.'

'Yes,' said Gabrielle, absently, when a pause in the conversation seemed to demand a reply.

'Your friend has, I suppose, some private means?'

'He is very rich.'

'Really! I had hardly ventured to hope that such could be the case. Very rich! Is it possible? I must say I am most agreeably surprised. Have you known him long?'

'I knew him well some years ago, but we have not met lately.'

'And well connected, I conclude?'

'Yes.'

'And an honourable, high-principled man?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, Gabrielle, I think you will admit that your cousin is a most fortunate girl?'

'Singularly so, if you are quite sure of Captain Kearney's intentions.'

'I have no right to say that I am quite sure; but I have a pair of eyes in my head, and Emma's impressions are the same as my own.'

'Oh!' The safe monosyllable was all Gabrielle could trust herself to utter.

'You have no reason for doubting Captain Kearney's good faith, have you? You do not imagine him to be a flirt?'

'No, indeed. I know nothing of Captain Kearney's intentions one way or the other, but I am sure he is not a flirt.'

'And surely you must have observed a something in his attentions to Emma—a something you ladies are generally quick enough to discern—'

'I fear I must be obtuse, for I have not observed anything particular.'

'Oh! but then you have not been much with them. Now that I have put you on the scent, you will have no difficulty in observing for yourself.'

'Perhaps not.'

'I shall tell Emma all that you have said, and we must exercise the virtue of patience. You will keep my little secret, eh, Gabrielle?'

'You need have no fear!' and any one but an elated father must have detected the bitterness with which she spoke.

Colonel Mostyn returned to the house, and Gabrielle wandered round and round the gravel paths, but found not that which she had come to seek—repose. In her restlessness she again went within doors, and ascended to her own room; but even Aileen's gentle attentions ruffled her, and, hating herself for the mood she was in, she returned to the drawing-room. She knew that she was only laying herself open to receive fresh wounds; yet the very torture attracted her, as the rattle-snake fascinates his victim.

She might have said with Aurora Leigh—

 . . . What we choose may not be good,
But, that we choose it proves it good for *us*.
 Moths will burn
Their wings—which proves that light is good for moths,
Who else had flown not where they agonise.

And perhaps the torture of mind which Gabrielle sometimes endured was good for her, little as she knew it at the time; for it taught her to look into her own heart, and revealed to her depths of feeling of which she had been hitherto unconscious, hidden as they were beneath a crust of real, but not altogether ignoble, pride, and a yearning for justice.

Justice had been done—the freedom for which she had longed was hers—pride had been vindicated—and Gabrielle was more restless, more dissatisfied than ever.

Mrs. Pierrepont had arranged an excursion by sea to the village of Swanage; but as she could not herself venture by water, Colonel Mostyn and Mrs. Oldfield chaperoned the party. The steamboat called at Bournemouth pier at an early hour, and the sea—a vast spread of bright ripples—was all that could be desired.

The coast scenery between Bournemouth and the Isle of Purbeck was extremely picturesque. The heath-covered cliffs, crowned here and there by pine-plantations, broke off abruptly into a series of low sandhills, and terminated with the fine expanse of water called Poole Harbour, at the entrance of which lay Branksea Island. Beyond, again, rose Studland Head, and further on the small town of Swanage, with a background of smooth green downs and rugged quarries, and the wide sweep of sand which encircles the bay. The long hours of the spring morning were passed by all the party on the downs, where, towards midday, one of Mrs. Pierrepont's sumptuous picnic-luncheons was spread; and the afternoon was spent on the sands, that the party might be within easy reach of the steam-boat, when it called on its homeward route.

The afternoon was far advanced when they again arrived at the Bournemouth pier. Mrs. Pierrepont had sent the carriage to meet them. Gabrielle was in haste to return home, as she feared Aileen must have been more than usually lonely during her long absence. She therefore went at once to her own room. To her surprise the fire flickered low in the grate, and the room was empty. This was so inconsistent with Aileen's unvarying care and thoughtfulness, that she felt more disturbed than the facts would seem to warrant. Never, since their arrival at Bournemouth, had Aileen been absent at that hour of the day. Never had Gabrielle failed to find a cheerful fire and a sweet face awaiting her, and the various articles of her toilet spread out so as to spare her the slightest trouble or concern. It was no selfish thought that now disturbed her; an undefined dread of evil oppressed her. She passed from the sitting-room to the bed-room, and from the bed-room to the sitting-room, pondering what this might mean. Then a little note on the toilet table caught her eye. She caught at it with trembling fingers, and read the confirmation of her worst fears.

'Dearest, dearest Sister,—I must leave you. I know that it is right to do so, though it breaks my heart.

Mrs. Pierrepont has shown me the truth. It was so sweet to be with you that I never faced the truth before, though I often felt as if I had no right to be so very happy. Your kindness made me almost forget the great distance between us, and in our quiet world at Heatherbrae I forgot that people might think less well of you if they knew that I was your sister. Forgive me for having thought of my own happiness instead of your welfare. That ought to be, and is, if you could see into my heart, my first desire. You are too tender-hearted, too noble to take any steps that might pain me, or separate me from you, so I must take them myself, and God will take care of me, and I shall be happy if I know that you are happy. Perhaps when we are both very old it will not matter so much, and then I can come back to you and try to be a comfort to you. This will be something to look forward to. I will always pray for you, and I know you will pray for me, and by-and-by, when a little time has passed away, I will let you know where I am, and perhaps you will write to me once now and then, just to let me know that you are well, and that you have not ceased to love me. May God bless you for all you have been to me. My heart is so very, very full, I cannot say all I want to say, but I wish I could have shown you better how full of gratitude I have always been. Now I can do nothing to prove my love but go away and leave you; but no proof could have been so very, very hard as this, and I pray you to look upon it as the surest sign that I am

‘Your very own sister,
‘AILEEN.’

At first Gabrielle felt stunned—a strange, stupified feeling came over her. It could not be true. Then an overwhelming tenderness swelled up in her heart towards Aileen, to be followed by a great terror lest Aileen should be in difficulty or danger; but finally all these sensations gave place to a righteous indignation at the cruelty and cold-heartedness that had driven her

little sister from her warm, sheltering clasp out into the cold, cold world.

With all the impetuosity in her nature aroused, she flew downstairs to seek the author of this great wrong. Mrs. Pierrepont was writing in the study, and Gabrielle scarcely observed, in her agitation, that Captain Kearney was also writing a letter, at her uncle's writing-table, in a distant part of the room. Her appearance at once betrayed her state of mind, and it must be confessed that Mrs. Pierrepont quailed beneath the indignant flash of her niece's eye.

'Aunt Carry, is this your doing?' and she produced Aileen's sorrowful letter. 'Is it possible that you have been guilty of such a cruel, cruel act? that you have driven this poor, friendless, homeless child out into the wide world! Speak in your own defence—say it is not true! I cannot believe it of you!'

'Gabrielle! Gabrielle! my love, do not give way to this excitement. I don't know what you mean. I have driven no one out into the world. I have given a little quiet advice to that poor child you are pleased to call your sister, but what has this to do with driving her out into the world?'

'You have driven her! You told her her presence was an injury to me! You told her she ought to leave me! You told her she would injure my position in the world! You have made her a wanderer and an out-cast.'

'My love, be controlled—this state of excitement is most distressing, most unbecoming.'

'Excitement! would you have me sit with folded hands while the only heart in the world that is akin to my own is breaking? Would you have me pick and choose becoming phrases when my own little sister, my poor friendless little sister, is hiding in some lonely corner without one to take compassion on her? Don't mock me with such false refinement—I am in no state to bear it. Find my poor Aileen for me—send out and seek for her far and wide until you trace her.'

'Really, Gabrielle, if this young person has thought

it wise to leave you and return to her own friends, I should be very sorry to have the responsibility of bringing her back. You acted unwisely in removing her out of her true sphere, and I am sure it is very much for her happiness and your welfare that she should return to her former position in society.'

Mrs. Pierrepont rose as she spoke, for although she had carried a bold front she felt unable to meet Gabrielle's eye, and thought it not improbable that she should be overwhelmed with a torrent of invective, which, unpleasant at any time, would be doubly so in the presence of Captain Kearney. But Gabrielle had had time to recollect herself. She had no intention of pouring forth the indignation and bitterness that were surging within her. She saw her aunt's preparations for departure without a remonstrance, only as she was leaving the room, she exclaimed,

'May God forgive you the wrong you have done this day! You will not help me; but if all others forsake me, I will go in search of her myself this night, and I will never return to this house unless I return accompanied by her.'

Mrs. Pierrepont deemed it wiser to effect an ignominious retreat than to prolong the discussion. Gabrielle stood for some moments lost in meditation, and then the presence of Captain Kearney began for the first time to dawn upon her. As far as outward appearance went, the scene just enacted might have been unobserved by him. His pen was still between his fingers, and his eyes fixed upon the portfolio before him. In truth, much that he had heard was inexplicable to him. He knew nothing of the existence of Gabrielle's sister, though he gathered something of the truth from the few short sentences that had passed between Gabrielle and her aunt. He recollected then the case which Emma Mostyn had alluded to some time before, and saw at once that Miss Hope had been the person spoken of.

Gabrielle, meanwhile, stood doubtful what course to pursue. She thought of appealing to Captain Kearney for aid and co-operation, and then again shrank from

taking such a step. The thought of his high morality and keen sense of justice seemed to nerve her to the effort,—but the recollection of Colonel Mostyn's confidences repelled her, until at length the absolute necessity of doing something immediately, the thought that every moment's delay might be increasing the distance between herself and Aileen, overcame all other considerations. She had no other friend to whom she could appeal. She knew him to be noble and generous by nature, and not one likely to misconstrue her present mode of action. Still quivering with agitation, she approached the table at which he was seated.

'Captain Kearney, I am in great trouble. Will you out of Christian charity help me this day?'

Captain Kearney sprang to his feet. 'Miss Hope, you have but to command, and it is my pleasure to obey.'

'I am not commanding,' she said, in a tone half proud, half wounded. 'I am entreating a favour of you—a favour for one who is forsaken and desolate, and has been cruelly, cruelly treated. In the name of humanity, will you help me to seek for my little lost sister this night? She has been driven from this house by insinuations and reproaches. She has not a single friend except myself in all the world. She is gone I know not where, and I dread to think what will become of her if we cannot trace her. She will die in misery and starvation. She is so gentle, so sensitive, that unkindness will break her heart. She cannot have left this house very many hours. If I were but a man instead of a weak, helpless woman, I need ask no one's help,' and Gabrielle almost wrung her hands in anguish of mind; 'but I am weak, I am helpless in spite of all, and for her sake I will cast away pride—even proper pride—and pray for assistance in my search for her.'

'Cast away pride by all means; as to proper pride, I have never heard that strictly defined. I can set off on an errand of mercy to-night without laying you under any very weighty obligation, and I wait but for your orders to start at once.'

‘Where will you go? what will you do?’

‘I will endeavour to trace her to one of the nearest railway stations—there are only two—each about five miles distant. But how am I to recognise her?’

‘A slight figure, all in black, shrinking from observation, with a sweet face and soft brown eyes—you cannot mistake my Aileen.’

‘And you yourself—what will you do?’

‘I must wait, I suppose. I can be of no use if I accompany you—but the waiting will be so dreadful. Had I not better drive in one direction, and you in another?’

‘Yes, if I fail in tracing her, but not otherwise. In that case I will send you back word. Under any circumstances, I will send back a message to let you know what I have done. If I have to follow her to town or elsewhere, I shall not be able to return to-night, but you will make my excuses to Mrs. Pierrepont. Farewell.’

‘Goodbye, Captain Kearney, and thank you—in Aileen’s name I thank you heartily.’

Gabrielle returned to her own room, and the better to exercise herself in patience, resolved to make all comfortable for Aileen’s return. She would return, she knew well. The matter was in safe keeping, and her mind was relieved of half its anxiety. It was impossible to appear at the dinner table, so she sent an excuse for herself and Captain Kearney to Mrs. Pierrepont’s room, and then ordered the fire to be lighted, and tea served in her own apartment. Poor little Aileen! every article in the room recalled her image, and as Gabrielle sat musing over the fire, a sense of utter dissatisfaction with her own recent conduct arose in her mind. Since she had been at Bournemouth, she had left Aileen so much alone. She admitted to herself, that her thoughts had been so pre-occupied by her own cares and anxieties, that even when she had been with Aileen in their own room, she had been too glad to escape from the necessity for self-exertion, and had often relapsed into silence and abstraction, when her little lonely sister must have been longing for the loving sympathy she had enjoyed at Heatherbrae.

Gabrielle reproached herself in no scant measure. She saw, now, how her own conduct had lent additional weight to Mrs. Pierrepont's representations. Aileen probably felt that she was no longer necessary to her sister—that Gabrielle's joys and sorrows were not her's; and she might, moreover, have imagined that Mrs. Pierrepont's remonstrances had caused the depression and abstraction which had pained her. Day after day, in her solitude, she must have brooded over these things, until she was ready to take flight at the first suggestion that her presence was inconvenient and oppressive.

'From first to last I have been wrong,' sighed Gabrielle. 'And I begin to think the error lies within myself—not in the circumstances that control me. All my life long I have been pursuing phantoms. I thought I was going to find happiness in retirement—but even retirement failed to bring me the happiness I sought. I thought I was going to find it in benevolence—but my philanthropy was marred by failure, and brought me no sensible delight. I thought my depression arose from the thralldom in which I was held, and I craved for freedom of heart and will—I cast away my chains, and found myself more closely bound than ever—bound by the cruel necessity of making myself a law to myself, the arbiter of my own destiny, the judge of my own actions. I had carved out my own future, and the contemplation of that future grew hateful to me. But the true light is breaking on me slowly and surely. The fault lies within, not without. I read yesterday,

Up—God has form'd thee with a wiser view,
Not to be led in chains, but to subdue;
Calls thee to cope with enemies, and first
Points out a conflict with thyself, the worst.

'I have been led in chains, and the chains that fettered me were not the chains against which I chafed and fretted. The chains against which I rebelled hung lightly and loosely on my limbs—they bound me but in

outward show, and, in truth, neither galled nor oppressed me. Yet, while I inveighed against them, I was all the while hugging my secret fetters more and more closely. I clasped tightly and yet more tightly the iron bonds that were eating their way into my life—that were binding me hand and foot, though I knew it not—and spreading their subtle poison through my veins.

‘I have acted upon impulse, and have been tossed to and fro like a vessel without moorings. Pride or self-will, and the mere impulses of generosity and natural benevolence, have influenced all my actions. Every motive, good or bad, has been a selfish one—not the less selfish because outwardly unblameable. There has been no underlying principle at the root of all,—no motive that would have proved its own reward, independent of result. Yet such there must be if life is not to be frittered away. I have been my own mistress all my life long, and the consequence is, that I rebel against all appearance of restraint. The thought of surrendering my own will to that of another has been insupportable. The very control of duty has been oppressive. I have thrown off all outward restraints, and given myself over to the keeping of my own impulses. Those impulses have been, in themselves, good and pure, and have deceived me. And now that I have rejected outward helps, I am thrown back on my inward resources, and find them insufficient for happiness or self-guidance.

‘What might I not have learned of Aileen?—that simple child, in whose mind there is but one issue—right or wrong! with whom impulse is instantly brought to the test of obedience—unswerving obedience to the testimony of a pure conscience and a clearly defined faith! She is independent of outward results—the spring of action is from within, and will bear her harmless if disappointment rather than success should be the result. Aileen! I am not too proud to learn of you—you and another, and the lesson of life itself, have already taught me something—to know myself. And, knowing myself, I have learned something more—to distrust myself. I

have learned that I am my own worst enemy—that Providence would have been kind to me, but I would not be kind to myself. And now, having carved for myself the future that lies before me, I can but meet it steadfastly. I can but resolve that the errors of the past shall bear as little fruit as may be in the future, and that a nobler future shall lay its foundations “upon the irrevocable past.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

We say our hearts are great, and cannot yield;
Because they cannot yield, it proves them poor.

Lady Eliz. Carew.

WITHIN an hour of Captain Kearney's departure, a messenger returned, bearing a note written in pencil for Miss Hope. It was but brief, yet it tranquillised Gabrielle's mind on the question of her own movements.

‘I am on the track. Do not expect me to-night, as I shall probably have to go to town. From thence I will telegraph.

‘F. K.’

Barren information enough, yet Gabrielle read and re-read the note, and placed it beneath her pillow when she retired to rest. Poor little Aileen! she would soon be in safe keeping; and having sat up sufficiently long to give Captain Kearney time to bring back his charge, supposing she might not yet have started on the longer journey, Gabrielle went to bed to recruit her strength for another day.

‘To rest, but not to sleep,’ she had said to herself, as she laid her head on the pillow; but, whether the pencilled words in the well-remembered handwriting served as a charm, or whether the relief from immediate anxiety for Aileen's safety broke the spell of wakefulness, she knew

not. In truth, she knew nothing, remembered nothing, until the soft rays of sunrise fell upon her eyelids, and told her another day had dawned.

Captain Kearney had found the object of his search already on her way to town. He had telegraphed a full description, with a request that she might be detained at the terminus, and had followed in person by the next up-train.

'The young lady's all right, sir,' was the announcement that greeted him, when he proceeded to enquire into the fulfilment of his orders. But before seeking Aileen's presence, he despatched his promised message to Aileen's sister.

'Successful. We shall return by the first train.

'F. K.'

Then he followed his guide to the ladies' waiting-room, where a gentle girl in deep mourning was grimly guarded by a defiant duenna.

He spoke no word, but having amply recompensed the trusty guardian, offered his arm to the captive, with a reassuring smile that seemed to reply to the wistful enquiry of the dark and pleading eyes.

An hour must elapse before the train started by which they could return, and Captain Kearney led his companion to a quiet apartment near at hand where they might obtain the refreshment they both needed.

'Do you know who I am?' he asked, presently.

'Yes,' said Aileen, softly, 'and I know who you come from. But oh! Captain Kearney, may I speak out? May I tell you what has brought me here to-day?'

'Yes—unless you would prefer my telling you. Was it not distrust of a sister's affection that drove you from that sister's side?'

Aileen burst into tears. 'I thought you would have been against me, too. I thought all were against me, except herself—and that, being against me, you were in a measure against her also.'

'But if we had all been against you, would that have lessened the sacredness of the tie that bound you together? Should it not rather have linked you more closely?'

'Mrs. Pierrepont did not think so.'

'Did your sister think so?'

'I never asked her. How could I when my interests were all one way? You must know her well enough to feel sure that, at any cost to herself, she would have kept me with her, and have braved the opinion of the world, and the displeasure of friends, and every other trial, rather than have cast me adrift.'

'Certainly she would have done all this.'

'And when I saw her sorrowful and depressed—so unlike what she had been at Heatherbrae—how could I bear to think that she was suffering for me, and not try to relieve her of the pain of my presence?'

'How do you know her sorrow and depression were on your account?'

'I thought they were. At Heatherbrae I had been able to cheer her, and I saw that I was a comfort to her; but latterly my efforts have been of no use—she seemed cheerful in society, but sad and silent with me.'

'Her very silence may have been a proof of her affection. We throw off the mask of unreality when we are with those we love, and in fulness of confidence indulge in the mood that prevails at the time.'

'Do you think so, indeed? Oh! if I could but believe this! If I could but think I had been a comfort to her! But do you not know that her uncle and aunt were grieved with her on my account?'

'I know very little of what has passed on the subject, but of one thing I feel sure—that no worldly motives of prudence or self-interest would have influenced your sister's conduct towards yourself.'

'And now—is it Gabrielle who has sent in search of me?'

'Yes. If you had seen her as I saw her, you would not now be wanting in faith in your sister.'

Aileen was silent. Some feelings are too deep to find

vent in words. Captain Kearney seemed also to have received food for reflection, and the pair who travelled back to Bournemouth that spring morning were wrapt in their own meditations.

Gabrielle had passed the morning alone in her uncle's room. Mrs. Pierrepont had given her guests to understand that her niece was indisposed, and that Captain Kearney had been unexpectedly summoned to town. When, therefore, Gabrielle saw a merry party set off for the sands, she went downstairs into the quiet study to await the arrival of the travellers.

It was a happy moment for both sisters when they were again clasped in each other's arms.

'Aileen! Aileen!' murmured Gabrielle, 'how could you doubt me? Don't you know that you are the only being on earth whose love I can claim, or in whom I have any right of possession? Not that I blame you altogether for distrusting me—the fault has been greatly my own, and I shall have a confession to make to you by and by, and your pardon to ask. But at present it is enough to know that you are come back to me, and that you are not the desolate wanderer I pictured you.'

'It is I who must ask pardon,' sobbed Aileen. 'I know now that I ought to have trusted to your love, but I feared I was selfish, and I longed so much to stay that I thought I might be deceiving myself, and that it was my duty to go. I knew so little of the world, that when your aunt blamed me for staying with you I could not hesitate any longer.'

'How can I thank you, Captain Kearney?' said Gabrielle, with some embarrassment, while Aileen stole away to her own room, unperceived. 'I beg you to believe that I am truly and sincerely grateful for your kindness.'

'Nay, Miss Hope; it was in the name of Christian charity and common humanity that you entreated my assistance, and the testimony of conscience is all the reward I desire.'

'Reward you I cannot, but surely I may venture to thank you.'

'I think not; I should be sorry, even in so slight a matter, if you felt that you lay under the weight of any obligation to me.'

'Do you think I am too proud to endure the weight of obligation?' asked Gabrielle, with some mortification.

'I cannot say. Pride is an ugly word. Perhaps you would call the feeling referred to "proper pride." I never was skilled in definitions.'

'Perhaps, without being skilled in definitions, you may have heard of, and comprehended the value of, a quality called "self-respect."'

'I never identified it with "proper pride."'

'My self-respect does not refuse to admit that I am under a great obligation to you in this matter, and my proper pride is in no way mortified at the admission. You have shown that you are not lacking in Christian charity. Might not an exercise of Christian humility enable you to accept the thanks of one you have benefited?'

'Humility! Ah! Miss Hope, you have chosen a fruitful theme. You will find in me an apt pupil. Enlarge upon this noble subject. Let me assure you I am all attention.'

'The preacher, Captain Kearney, may enlarge as eloquently upon virtues in which he is himself deficient, as upon those in which he himself excels. I am inclined to think the sense of loss would endue him with greater zeal than the sense of possession, provided he knew that it was loss.'

'I think so too, in some cases, but not in that of the case in point. Humility feeds humility—the lowliest man feels most keenly his own self-sufficiency. That which in our eyes would appear to be humbleness, would in his eyes be tainted with self-love, vanity, worldliness. He is not satisfied with conceiving himself to be nothing—he sees how much less than nothing he must appear in the eyes of Omnipotence. How the nothing out of which he was created has been soiled and overlaid with the growth of evil imaginations, pride of

heart, self-will. Which of us has reached this depth of self-abasement?’

‘Not I for one,’ said Gabrielle; ‘and since my theme has found so able an exponent, in your hands I will leave it. Let me once more repeat, however, that, whether acceptable or not, my gratitude must be yours for what you have done for me and mine. My sister will tell me the particulars of your search for her. I have only one thing more to say,’ and here Gabrielle paused, in some embarrassment, and drew forth her purse

Captain Kearney was leaning against the side of the window that opened out upon the garden. Gabrielle’s action was evidently not lost upon him, but he made no attempt to relieve her embarrassment, and waited silently for what was to come.

‘I know,’ pursued poor Gabrielle, ‘that you must have been at a considerable outlay for my sister. Her journey and the various other expenses——’

Again she hesitated, and again Captain Kearney left her in her dilemma. After a moment’s pause, he remarked,

‘You were observing, Miss Hope——?’

‘Yes,’ said Gabrielle, flushing all over. ‘You know what I mean. My sister’s expenses you will allow me, I hope, to defray. For the rest I will offer you nothing but gratitude.’

‘Ah!’ said Captain Kearney, bitterly. ‘There ought to be a reckoning, of course. I had forgotten that. Let the reckoning be mutual. Take back again the thanks I was weak enough to accept, if the miserable shadow of a few paltry coins is supposed to lay you under an obligation to me. Pride!—nay, ugly as the term is, I will never sink it in that of self-respect. You owe me—let me see—I must be exact even to a fraction. Shall I not make out an account?’

Gabrielle looked deeply pained. ‘What have I done wrong?’ she asked. ‘Is it not usual to arrange such matters afterwards? Have I offended against propriety, against good taste?’

‘On the contrary,’ he replied, coldly. ‘Your conduct has been regulated by the strictest propriety—the most unerring good taste. Your sister is less familiar with the rules of good society. It never occurred to her that she was in my debt.’

‘Poor little Aileen!’ and there was a sadness of expression in the tone that conveyed innumerable reflections, the chief of which was ‘Aileen’s ignorance is bliss, but ignorance cannot now be my portion.’

‘I am sorry I have offended you, Captain Kearney. We will say no more about it. My sister and myself are much indebted to you.’

‘Rather than that you should feel yourself under an obligation to me, Miss Hope, I will get a Bradshaw and relieve your mind.’

‘I can bear the weight of obligation,’ said Gabrielle, quietly, ‘better, perhaps, than I can bear the being misunderstood! It appears, however, that both are to be my portion. But we will not prolong a painful discussion.’

The discussion had been a painful one,—so full of pain to Gabrielle that as she ascended to her own room she was fain to dash away the tears that gathered in her eyes. ‘He said we were to part friends,’ she soliloquised. ‘How much more like enemies! And yet who can say whether the fault may not be in some measure mine? I ought to have known that the mention of money would be hateful to him, yet he need not have misjudged me. It was not exactly pride—at least, I think not. But I know not what to call it. It *was* the feeling that I would not be indebted, even to him—or rather, of all men, not to him—after what had passed. He saw this, I believe, and it pained him. Unfortunate that I am! I wish to do the right thing, and invariably do the wrong.’

‘And whither were you bound, my poor Aileen?’ she asked, when Aileen had sobbed out the whole history of her miserable flight, up to the point of Captain Kearney’s discovery of her in the waiting-room.

‘I thought I would go to Miss Tudor—your cousin.

I knew she was good and kind, and I had seen her address on your letters to her. I could think of no one else, and I thought she would let me stay with her for a day or two, until I could meet with a situation.'

'Wisely thought of, poor child. And so Captain Kearney found you in the waiting-room. Were you alarmed when they took you into custody at the terminus?'

'Not alarmed, for I knew it must be your doing. When I saw Captain Kearney, I knew all was well, and he was so gentle and considerate—so kind to me!'

'Was he?—tell me in what way?'

'In every way—so thoughtful for my comfort! He reassured me about you, and gave me, oh! such hope and happiness, for he said opposition ought to have made us cling more closely together, and that no opposition could lessen the sacredness of the tie that bound us,' and Aileen sobbed again in the fulness of her heart.

'Did he say so?'

'Yes, and that I ought to have had full faith in you, and have felt certain that no considerations of worldly prudence or self-interest would have influenced your conduct towards me.'

'Did he indeed say this? I thought he believed me to be worldly-minded and selfish. Then he does give me credit for some sincerity. Oh Aileen! I have a great deal to say to you—I have been more to blame than you think; but I never, never wished my sister anywhere but by my side, and I shudder even now to think what my life would have been without her.'

Aileen raised her face beaming with affection, and whispered, 'I shall never doubt again.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

There's small sincerity in mirth,
And laughter oft is but an art
To drown the outcry of the heart.

H. Coleridge.

'MRS. PIERREPONT, may we play at some game to-night?' exclaimed Emma, one evening, when the gentlemen had re-joined them after dinner. 'Thread-paper poetry, or nouns and questions? I am so fond of pencil games.'

'Because you excel in them, Emma; but every one is not so quick. However, if Mrs. Oldfield and Lucy feel inclined to join, I am sure I have no objection.'

Mrs. Oldfield professed herself willing, and Emma went in search of Gabrielle, who was not in the room.

When they returned together, most of the party had seated themselves at the table, and it required some little manœuvring on Emma's part to contrive that Captain Kearney should sit next to her.

'Oh! papa, you cannot sit with your back to the fire. You must change places, indeed you must. I am sure Captain Kearney will be so very kind as to come on this side and give you his place. Oh! you are very good, Mr. Oldfield, but you are hardly so far from the fire as Captain Kearney, and papa is so soon upset.'

Captain Kearney changed places with alacrity. Emma gained her point, and Gabrielle noted all in silence.

The questions and nouns were soon written on their respective slips of paper, re-distributed, and then knitted brows and silence prevailed for a time. Mr. Pierrepont was as fond of a game of this kind as any one; and Colonel Mostyn, who might not be supposed to excel in a game that required some fertility of brain and ingenuity, had acquired, through constant practice, the knack of writing something that rhymed on any given subject. Emma was really quick, and was always ready to help any one less fertile in imagination than herself.

After a time, the papers were all given in, and Mr. Pierrepont read them aloud. Gabrielle thought she was able to identify the authorship of some, but of others she felt unable to fix upon the writers, and one or two were so colourless as to defy identification.

“Who killed Cock Robin?” Mistletoe.’

Tho’ the broken heart no longer
Finds in man a place,
Yet affection must be stronger
In the feathered race.

Robin’s heart we know was broken,
Broken long ago,
When his Jenny scorned Love’s token
Neath the Mistletoe.

‘Good!’ observed Mr. Pierrepont; ‘but the test of skill and ingenuity is to compress the whole into one verse.’

‘But that is quite impossible sometimes, Mr. Pierrepont,’ exclaimed Emma, ‘or it results in an uncouth and rugged production. Some nouns are so incompatible with the drift of the question.’

‘Some one here has not found it impossible; at all events,’ remarked Mr Pierrepont; ‘and yet the noun is one that would hardly be compatible with any question.’

“When shall we three meet again?” Paul Pry.’

My Paper, my Pencil, and I,
Are loth from each other to sever,
But if we’re to write on ‘Paul Pry,’
Oh! may we unite again—never!

‘Yes, that is very good,’ said Emma, ‘but we must not be too severe in our demands upon the general public.’

“Why is that cheek so pale?” Drum.’

My cheek is pale
I can’t deny,
That Drum of figs,
Is the reason why.

'I hope I am not responsible for the pale cheeks,' said Mrs. Pierrepont, smiling; and, looking round the table, she turned towards Mr. Oldfield. 'Charley, I think you can boast of the palest cheeks of the company. I shall keep my figs in future out of your way.'

Mr. Oldfield laughed and shook his head, and Mr. Pierrepont proceeded.

"Why has not man a microscopic eye?" Mouse.'

Your query I cannot reply to,
Because it is based upon error,
Oft I sigh for a refuge to fly to,
Like a Mouse overwhelmed with terror,

For man's sight all depends on the topic,
Brought under his notice, I deem,
And at once it becomes microscopic
When the faults of our sex are the theme.

Gabrielle recognised Emma's handiwork immediately, and perceived the force of her animated defence of the double verse.

'Very fair,' said Mr. Pierrepont, 'but it will not admit of microscopic investigation. The writer refers to the eye of the mind, while Pope alludes to the natural eye.'

'Oh! Mr. Pierrepont,' exclaimed Emma, 'you are so unmercifully critical! We cannot all be poet laureates.'

'Well, well, let me go on. The next is in one verse.

"Wilt thou be my dearie?" Plums.'

Kind sir, when bounteous autumn brings her fruits,
Of sending Plums to you I shall not weary,
But—standing six-foot-three without my boots,—
I hardly think you'd like me for your dearie.

This occasioned some mirth, but the next fell proportionately flat.

“Will you meet me by moonlight alone?” Toad.’

I will meet you by moonlight alone,
If it is not upon the high road;
For there I must candidly own
I should fear much to tread on a Toad.

‘I must say I sympathise with that writer,’ said Mrs. Pierrepont. ‘It would require some warmth of affection to take one out by moonlight alone, and nothing short of an all-absorbing attachment could render one indifferent to the horrid contingency of setting one’s foot on a toad.’

‘I imagine the high road to be a somewhat improbable trysting-place for lovers to meet clandestinely,’ said Mr. Pierrepont.

‘And that verse abundantly proves the objection to compression, Mr. Pierrepont,’ said Emma. ‘In two verses a really pretty poem might have been contrived, in which mushrooms and toad-stools would have figured.’

‘Well, here are your two verses to order.’

“Is there a dearth of kindness in this world of ours?” Star.’

As long as you’ve plenty of money
This world is exceedingly kind,
And, though you may perhaps think it funny,
To your faults will be wondrously blind.

But, the Star of your luck disappearing,
If your sins have not beat a retreat,
Then, a virtuous visage uprearing,
She tramples you under her feet.

‘That is too cynical a sentiment for you, Captain Kearney,’ observed Emma. ‘I am sure the world has always treated you too kindly for such a reflection to proceed from you. I cannot at all fix upon the author. No one here has a trampled-upon appearance.’

‘It may proceed from some one whose star of destiny has only set to rise again, Miss Mostyn,’ said Captain Kearney. ‘Or, even otherwise, a man may be a moralist who has had no experience of adversity. At all events the reflection is trite enough.’

“What are the wild waves saying?” Kiss.’

The restless waves that kiss the shore
Chant a song with a sad refrain,
For their ceaseless roar says—Nevermore
Shall the past return again.

‘Very pretty,’ cried Emma, ‘but I protest against a substantive being turned into a verb. It is quite against rule.’

‘Never mind,’ said Mr. Pierrepont, ‘the result is good, and as the author is anonymous he cannot be reprimanded.’

‘Mr. Pierrepont, I believe it is your own.’

‘Oh no!’ said Gabrielle, ‘I am sure it is not. We have had Uncle Pierrepont’s before.’

‘Really! I wish I had known. Gabrielle, I believe you peeped!’

‘No; I am too familiar with Uncle Pierrepont’s style not to recognise it, and Aunt Carry’s too.’

‘And mine too, I suppose.’

‘Yes, and yours too, Emma.’

‘Well, I give every one fair warning that the papers are to be my perquisites. I keep a book for all such productions.’

‘I thought you disapproved of books containing souvenirs of your friends, Miss Mostyn,’ said Captain Kearney.

‘Indeed, Captain Kearney, I never thought of such a thing till you suggested it. But my book, as you may imagine, is a far less sentimental one than Gabrielle’s.’

‘So I should suppose,’ said Captain Kearney, drily, ‘and your definition of “friends” must be somewhat more liberal than your cousin’s.’

‘I have only one more,’ remarked Mr. Pierrepont.

“Will you love me then as now?”—Tear.’

Stay, ah, stay the idle Tear,
Smooth the ruffled brow;
I ne’er can love thee less, my dear,
For—I do not love thee now.

‘A good one to conclude with,’ said Mr. Pierrepont,

adding it to the small heap of papers that lay on the table before him. There was a general move, and Emma stooped in search of her pocket-handkerchief, which she had let fall some time before. When she arose she observed Captain Kearney tearing a slip of paper into infinitesimal morsels.

'Oh! what are you doing? Those papers are mine. Captain Kearney, surely you have not been destroying any.'

'Only one, of which I had not parted with the copyright.'

'Then let me have the scraps! I have a particular reason. You cannot refuse me when I ask it as a favour.'

'Too late, Miss Mostyn,' and Captain Kearney tossed the fragments on to the glowing embers. 'Look at the illumination! Some productions are more brilliant in their demise than ever they have been in their existence.'

Gabrielle, meanwhile, turned over the remainder of the contributions in search of her own, which she failed to find. 'Emma,' she observed, presently, in a low voice, 'have you taken mine?'

'No; but I intend to do so, Gabrielle. I am not sure which was yours—either Cock Robin or the Wild Waves, I imagine. Here is Cock Robin—oh! then you do not lay claim to that. Well, the other does not appear to be here.'

'The other, whichever it may have been, is evidently not here,' said Gabrielle, much perplexed. 'However, it is not worth making a fuss about. If you take my advice, Emma, you will burn them all.'

'But I shall not take your advice, my good cousin, and I am only provoked at having lost two of the best.'

The following morning proved wet, and Emma employed herself in copying the productions of the preceding evening into a kind of scrap-book, in which a miscellaneous collection of treasures was stored. Captain Kearney always found occupation for a wet day in working up his rough sketches.

Gabrielle tried to read a book, but she found it impossible to close her ears to Emma's running commentary upon each fragment of poetry as she inscribed it; and at length the incessant appeals to Captain Kearney, the lamentations over the lost contributions, and the laboured endeavours to make it appear that in matters of painting and poetry a private understanding existed between the two seated at the table, proved too much for Gabrielle's powers of endurance. She fled to her own room, and spent the chief part of the morning with Aileen.

The sisters were amusing themselves in the manufacture of gifts to carry back to their friends at Heatherbrae. Gabrielle was making a sermon-case for Mr. Wheeler, in maroon-coloured velvet, with a raised cross worked in gold-coloured silk. She was also employed upon a travelling bag for Mrs. Melville, which was to be fitted up with every conceivable requirement for the short journeys Mrs. Melville was in the habit of making. Aileen was embroidering a pocket-handkerchief for Miss Melville, and was also making a warm crochét shawl for Molly, so they never lacked occupation.

When luncheon-time drew near, Gabrielle laid aside her work and once more returned to the drawing-room.

Captain Kearney was still working assiduously with his brush, but Emma had left her seat at the table, and was standing behind his chair, commenting upon the picture he was drawing, and bestowing admiration in no measured terms.

'O Gabrielle! this is the prettiest picture Captain Kearney has yet drawn. It is quite lovely! I shall never care to look at my screens again after seeing this. Do come and look at it—it is almost finished.'

Gabrielle could not but comply, for she was forced to pass near the table to reach the part of the room in which she usually sat. She paused behind Captain Kearney's chair and looked at the drawing.

It was indeed a lovely sketch, drawn in his best style, with much care and labour. But Gabrielle's heart seemed to stand still when she recognised the familiar

ruins of a portion of Heidelberg Castle, where often and often in former days she had sat with Frank Kearney, making pencil sketches under his direction, while he read aloud to her his favourite poems—'Hohenlinden,' 'Locksley Hall,' or passages from 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.' No spot was so full of association as the one he had chosen. She remembered the pointed-leaved ivy clambering over the crumbling wall, the burdock leaves and wild arum growing below—the very moss and lichen which filled up the crevices between the richly tinted stone. But more than all she seemed to recognise the girlish figure seated below, the straw hat thrown aside with a bunch of half-faded wild flowers, and the slight but manly figure that leant against the ruined wall, and looked down upon his companion.

It was too cruel—too cruel—the bitterest wound he could have inflicted upon her—the crowning insult of all. Had he not the nobleness to let the past be as though it had never been? Must he bring to the light associations so hallowed by memory that, in spite of all that had occurred since, they were stored away in the secret recesses of her heart? Was the sketch to form a subject of merriment between himself and Emma as soon as they were out of her presence? Was Emma to show it to her friends—to have it mounted perhaps in a portfolio to lay on her drawing-room table? Oh! he was heartless—heartless; she could not have acted so by him. She would rather have gone away at once, and for ever, than have turned the solemn past into a jest, and trifled with feelings which he might have felt sure were still in existence—still quivering ere they were finally quenched.

'Have you drawn it from imagination?' asked Emma, 'or is it from some picture you have seen?'

'From a picture I saw once,' he replied, calmly, 'many years ago. I am glad you like it; that proves to me that my memory has not been unfaithful.'

'But the details—how could you remember the details? But perhaps you supplied them from your own imagination, as you were in course of sketching.'

‘No; I believe even the details are due to memory rather than any inventive power I may possess.’

‘But, Captain Kearney, I wish you had painted the faces; if the figures had been turned the least bit more this way the faces would have been distinguishable. What is she doing?—is that work she has in her hand?’

‘You can call it what you like. I fancied it must be a sketch-book, but perhaps it may be embroidery. Now I think it is finished, unless you can suggest any addition.’

‘No, indeed, it is quite perfect. You could not possibly improve it. Oh! do be careful!’ she exclaimed, as he proceeded to loosen it from the block by the aid of a paper knife. ‘The least slip would be fatal, and I would not have it injured for the whole world.’

‘No fear of its being injured,’ said Captain Kearney, as he finally disengaged it, and held it up to examine for an instant. ‘Miss Mostyn, you must already be surfeited with sketches of mine. I will offer this one to your cousin, if she will do me the favour of accepting it.’

As he spoke he placed the picture in Gabrielle’s hand, then quietly put together his drawing materials, and went out of the room.

Gabrielle stood riveted to the spot, the picture in her hand, but unable to utter a word in reply. Her whole heart reproached her for the hard thoughts in which she had indulged. The revulsion of feeling produced by this simple action caused absolute pain. It was a guarantee to her that, however entirely he might acquiesce in the wisdom of her decision as to the future, yet he was far from being capable of turning the past into a jest. It was a further guarantee that, whatever might be his present feeling towards Emma, yet Emma had never heard from him of his former feeling towards Gabrielle. Oil had been poured on the troubled waters, and now, in the very presence of the source of her discomfort, Gabrielle found the repose which she had sought elsewhere in vain.

‘And so, Gabrielle,’ observed Emma, ‘that picture which I have been coveting for the last two hours is not worth so much as a “thank you” in the estimation of the lucky possessor.’

Gabrielle smiled.

‘Well, I must say, my good cousin,’ continued Emma, ‘that I wish you had delayed your coming for another half-hour. The sketch would then have been mine, and I certainly feel that I have the best right to it, having watched its progress from the first pencil outline to the last finishing touch. You do not profess to care much about drawing. Be good-natured, and make over the sketch to me.’

Gabrielle merely shook her head.

‘I will tell you what I will do, Gabrielle. I will give you my screens for it when they are finished—both of them, and they will look lovely on the mantelpiece at Heatherbrae. Come, be reasonable. I particularly want that sketch, because I have a carved frame at home which it will exactly suit. I had planned it all, and that it should hang over my writing-desk in the drawing-room. Please, Gabrielle?’

‘Did you ever hear a story of a little ewe lamb, Emma? Be content with the many drawings Captain Kearney has given you already, and leave me and my little ewe lamb in peace.’

‘I have no choice but to do so if you refuse to come to terms; but I did not think you would have been selfish, Gabrielle.’

‘I am sorry I appear in so unamiable a light. I will hide away the apple of discord, and then we shall be as good friends again as ever.’

‘Captain Kearney,’ said Emma, somewhat later in the day, ‘I am very angry with you for giving that charming sketch to my cousin, who cares nothing about art. She has probably put it away in a drawer and will never look at it again.’

‘Really! I gave her credit for considerable artistic talent. Her remarks are very suggestive sometimes—have you not observed this? But, after all, the little

sketch was not worth mentioning—the produce of an idle morning; and to be put away in a drawer and forgotten is the best fate it deserves.’

‘How can you say so? That is not the reception it would have met with had you given it to me. Shall you think me an extortioner if I entreat you as a personal favour to reproduce that sweet picture and bestow it upon me?’

‘Impossible! I never in my life repeated a sketch.’

‘But you could—or you could make a copy of the first. No other subject could please me so well.’

‘Indeed? I had no idea there was any special charm in the subject beyond that of association.’

‘Oh! but there was—I cannot describe—you seemed to have entered so much more minutely into the subject than is generally the case with your sketches. The details were so perfect—quite pre-Raphaelite. I am sure you have not the heart to refuse me, Captain Kearney.’

‘I fear you think too highly of that organ; it is nothing but a useful piece of mechanism, scarcely more sentient than flint or granite. I will draw you a very pretty picture to-morrow morning, Miss Mostyn, and we will not rob your cousin’s picture of the little value it possesses by destroying its originality.’

‘Then you feel no concern for the equanimity of my temper. I shall always feel out of humour when I see that picture hung up in the Heatherbrae drawing-room.’

‘Have you forgotten that you consigned it to ignoble oblivion in the bottom of a drawer? Have no fear, your cousin will never hang up that picture in her drawing-room at Heatherbrae. She has too much good taste.’

‘You have never been at Heatherbrae?’

‘Never.’

‘Yet you have known my cousin for a long while?’

‘For a long while.’

‘And you have not met for some years?’

‘Not for some years.’

‘Gabrielle is very pretty—do you not think so?’

‘I should not call her pretty.’

‘Not pretty? How then—would you call her beautiful?’

‘Not beautiful—the term that suits her countenance has never yet been coined.’

‘But you admire her?’

‘Admiration is a vague term, Miss Mostyn.’

‘At all events you like her?’

‘How could I possibly dislike a lady? and, moreover, a young lady, good-looking, amiable, and an heiress?’

‘I like my cousin Gabrielle exceedingly. She is a little peculiar, but perhaps that makes her all the more charming. This strange freak, for instance, about Heatherbrae—to live alone in that wild, desolate region without a protector! I shall be quite glad to hear Gabrielle is going to be married.’

‘Do you imagine such an event would take her from Heatherbrae, or do you only wish to see her with a male protector?’

‘I don’t know that it would necessarily take her away from Heatherbrae. Between ourselves, I thought dear Gabrielle’s fate would have been sealed ere now. A gentleman who accompanied us to Heatherbrae last August was passionately attached to my cousin, and although no engagement was entered into at that time, yet I feel confident such a result is only deferred.’

‘I hope it may be for her happiness.’

‘It will be. He is exactly suited to Gabrielle. My cousin, as you may have perceived, has a strong will of her own, and if ever she marries her will must be law. This would not suit all husbands; but Harold—I mean the gentleman of whom I am speaking—would have no will but hers, and would consider himself highly blest if permitted to spend his life at her side, her humble, obedient slave.’

‘I should not think Miss Hope would desire this in a husband.’

‘Not if put into words, perhaps, but in effect it will come to this. Gabrielle must rule, and in order to do this she must have a husband who will let her rule.’

‘Or none at all.’

‘That is not likely. I believe she is already weary of her lonely life.’

‘Why should you think so?’

‘She does not rave about Heatherbrae as she did at first. When she speaks of returning there her tone has none of the elation it used to have. I believe she thought she had found an Arcadia, and has discovered her mistake.’

‘Well, perhaps the Harold, whose surname you have not imparted to me, but whom we will call Harold the Dauntless, since he is prepared to surrender his own will, may convert Heatherbrae into a Paradise.’

‘We must hope so.’

‘Captain Kearney,’ said Emma, presently, ‘do you recollect that you promised to give me the address of a person in town from whom I could procure some really good water-colour sketches to copy?’

‘I did; I have it in my pocket-book, and will give it to you now.’

He took out his pocket-book, and turned out a number of loose papers, but the address required was not amongst them. ‘I think I must have it in my room, but I will fetch it immediately, lest I should forget it.’

When he was gone Emma eyed with some curiosity the small heap of papers lying on the table. One had fallen down, and she thought it bore a lady’s handwriting. On picking it up she found this to be the case. It was the missing verse of the previous evening—the answer to ‘What are the wild waves saying?’

‘He thinks it is mine,’ mused Emma, ‘shall I let him know I have discovered it, or not? I must, because otherwise I shall not be sure that he has mistaken the handwriting. Our hands are alike—Gabrielle’s and mine—at least, something alike, and he may easily have mistaken.’

When Captain Kearney returned, Emma observed:—

‘I have just made a discovery; the missing verse of last night has dropped out from among your papers, and

I found it on the floor. Did you know that it was in your pocket-book ?'

'I did, Miss Mostyn.'

'Then I suppose you know who wrote it.'

'I believe I do.'

'Then, Captain Kearney, I verily believe you are under a delusion.'

'I think not.'

'Have you ever seen the handwriting before ?'

'Yes.'

'Pardon my curiosity,—whose do you believe it to be ?'

'I believe it to be your cousin's.'

Emma hesitated. 'So it is, but how did you know it was her's ?'

'I have seen her handwriting before.'

'Did this verse strike you as exceptionally brilliant ?'

'Not brilliant ; I do not care for mere brilliance. I was struck by the feeling it expressed.'

'Surely a common enough feeling—regret for the past.'

'Very common indeed.'

'Captain Kearney, you are a riddle. If common, why did you keep it ?'

'Because even a common feeling may sometimes find an echo in another breast.'

'Do you mean that you also look back upon the past with regret ?'

'Possibly.'

'Well, I don't think I do. I always look forward. I always expect the future to be brighter than the past has been.'

'I thought only childhood indulged in such sanguine expectations.'

'And what part of your life do you look back upon with regret ?'

'My youth. Miss Mostyn, may I ask you to let me return that verse to my pocket-book ?'

'I do not think I ought to do so, Captain Kearney. I was specially charged by my cousin to destroy it.'

She would feel annoyed if she knew it was still in existence. Suppose it shares the fate of your own,' and, so saying, Emma dropped the slip of paper on to the glowing cinders.

Captain Kearney watched it consume in silence. Then he said: 'It was a pretty thought, was it not?' and repeated,

The restless waves that kiss the shore
Chant a song with a sad refrain,
For their ceaseless roar says—Nevermore
Shall the past return again.

'What a wonderful memory you have got!' said Emma, somewhat piqued.

'I fear not generally,' said Captain Kearney, composedly. 'I have to read a thing over a considerable number of times before I can commit it to memory.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

Come down . . . from yonder mountain height:
What pleasure lives in height (the shepherd sang)
In height and cold, the splendour of the hills?
But cease to move so near the Heavens, and cease
To glide a sunbeam by the blasted pine,
To sit a star upon the sparkling spire;
And come, for Love is of the valley.—*Tennyson*.

'SURELY, Captain Kearney, you are not going to bid us adieu altogether,' observed Mrs. Pierrepont, at the breakfast-table one morning.

'Indeed, I fear I must do so,' said Captain Kearney, as he folded up his letter. 'I have received more than one remonstrance already from friends who consider they have a claim upon my leisure.'

'And I suppose it is useless to ask you to return to us,' continued Mrs. Pierrepont, 'for we shall all be leaving this pleasant place soon. I hope we may meet in town. Do you think this likely?'

'Not very probable, I fear—at least, not probable at

present. You must be kind enough to give me the address of your town house, that I may at some future time have it in my power to renew so pleasant an acquaintance. I am sorry I shall have to leave without seeing Mr. Pierrepont. Have you any information as to his movements?’

‘He hopes to be with me again in the course of a few days. Surely you will not be forced to leave before his return.’

‘I am sorry to say that I must leave at once. I thought of travelling by night; and this will give me the whole of to-day, and enable me to reach my destination early to-morrow.’

‘Well, I am very sorry you are leaving. We are going to drive to Wimborne to-day, to see the beautiful minster. Gabrielle, my love, I have reckoned upon your joining us. You will enjoy the drive, and the sight of the fine old Abbey Church.’

‘I should enjoy it very much, but I fear I cannot go to-day, Aunt Carry. You will be a large party without me.’

‘We shall fill two carriages, and I have written to desire that luncheon may be prepared for us at Wimborne. I always think it is a pity not to see as much as possible of a neighbourhood.’

‘You have lionised us well in this neighbourhood, Mrs. Pierrepont,’ observed Mrs. Oldfield.

‘Yes,’ said Emma, with a sigh, ‘I wish this pleasant time were not so nearly over. Dear Bournemouth! I shall always look back upon it with affection.’

‘I am delighted to hear you say so, Emma,’ said Mrs. Pierrepont. ‘You are a most charming guest—so easily pleased! But how about the drawing lessons!’

‘Ah!’ said Emma, mournfully. ‘How about the drawing lessons!’

‘Patience and perseverance, Miss Mostyn,’ said Captain Kearney, in answer to her appealing look. ‘I need not remind you what marvels they can effect. I shall hope to see some of your productions next time I visit the Exhibition of Water Colours.’

‘I am sure I owe everything to your kind assistance,’

said Emma, in a dolorous tone. 'I shall never accomplish anything by myself, and shall probably throw aside my paper and brush as my cousin Gabrielle has done.'

A faint colour overspread Gabrielle's cheek.

'I never professed to feel a passion for art,' she remarked. 'Had I done so, I should probably have been an artist by this time.'

'Gabrielle,' said her aunt, as they afterwards met in the vestibule, 'are you resolved not to go with us to-day? I wish very much that you should, my dear.'

Gabrielle kissed her aunt, having privately resolved to let bygones be bygones. 'Not to-day, Aunt Carry—to-morrow you shall take me where you will.'

'But to-morrow Captain Kearney will be gone, and the Hamiltons are also on the eve of departure. We shall have no future expedition so pleasant as this one.'

'Never mind—they will probably be equally pleasant to me.'

'You must know, Gabrielle, that I am somewhat of a manœuvrer. We all have an idea that your friend Captain Kearney is kindly disposed towards Emma Mostyn, and as Emma's chances are few, I am making the most of this one for her. A pleasure excursion is a delightful opportunity for a *dénouement*.'

'You may remember of old that I never liked manœuvres, Aunt Carry. They generally fail; and if they succeed, surely, in such a matter, the result should be independent of attendant circumstances.'

'Ah, my love, that is very well in Utopia, but we who live in the world know that the most important events of life often turn upon trifles.'

Gabrielle escaped to her own room, and desiring Aileen to robe herself quickly, set off in the direction of the pine plantation, anxious to avoid the assembling pleasure party. Aileen, overjoyed at the prospect of a solitary walk with her sister, was not behindhand in her preparations.

They walked some way in silence over the pleasant ground. Gabrielle had exerted herself to the utmost of

her ability to be a sympathising companion to her sister since her return, but to-day the effort seemed to be beyond her power. For upwards of an hour they roamed onward through the grove, seldom breaking the silence, save by a passing observation. Then Gabrielle put her arm round her young sister and said, 'You must not think me unkind, Aileen, because I am disinclined to talk. I like to feel that we can wander together, and feel the sympathy of companionship, without being under the necessity of making conversation.'

'I know,' said Aileen, cheerfully. 'Captain Kearney taught me to see that. I prize your silence now as much as I used to prize your conversation. When you are silent, I feel that you look upon me as a sister, and no stranger.'

'Just so; we must be sisters in the spirit as well as in the letter. I have been thinking about our return to Heatherbrae. There is a general break-up commencing here, and when my aunt goes to town, we must go home. Shall you be glad to go home?'

'Very glad—more glad than I can say.'

'All mystery will cease then, and you will take your place as my sister. You will feel then that it is indeed home. You must help me to make schemes for benefiting the people: I wish to do so in a more systematic way than I have hitherto done, and you know, Aileen, I have no adviser. If I could but have the benefit of Dr. Blyth's clear head and experience—but, no, I suppose it is safer not.'

They talked about Heatherbrae and their plans during the whole of the remainder of the walk. On their return home, Gabrielle desired that luncheon might be served in their own room; and when the brief repast was concluded, she proposed that Aileen should take her work, and descended to the drawing-room in search of a book which had interested her, and which she thought Aileen would like to hear read aloud.

Several new books which had been just sent from the library lay on the table, but the one she sought was nowhere to be found. She took up the most promising of

the newly arrived volumes, and stood for a few moments upon the hearthrug, while she scanned the contents.

A sound at the window caused her to turn round. Captain Kearney had just returned from a walk, and seeing the window open, and Miss Hope within, he stepped across the low window-sill, and stood by her side.

She was considerably startled. 'I thought you were gone to Wimborne.'

'No; I had a letter to write, and some small amount of packing to do, and Mrs. Pierrepont kindly excused me. I am but just returned from the shore, where I have been taking a last sketch for Miss Mostyn. You have also been for a walk.'

'Yes, with my sister, in the pine-wood.'

Captain Kearney relieved himself of the hat he held in his hand, and the drawing materials which he usually carried in a small valise on his back. Then he returned to the hearthrug.

'This is probably the last interview I shall have with you alone,' he observed. 'You heard me say at the breakfast table that I must leave this evening. Destiny will probably bear me far from my native shore—certainly far from the distant spot in which you have made your home. It is best so—I am even glad this painful month has reached its close—a final parting is more endurable than the pain of daily meeting as strangers.'

'Not quite as strangers,' said Gabrielle, in a low tone.

'As worse than strangers!' he exclaimed, vehemently. 'This daily intercourse—seeing you, hearing you, touching your hand—has been worse to me than any parting; but I had resolved that it should be so, and I have carried out my resolution. I came here full of hope, desire, expectation—I came for the fulfilment of the dream that I had cherished for five long years. I saw you as I had dreamt that I should see you—changed, yet unchanged—at least externally—how changed at heart, I was soon to learn. When my hopes had been lowest, I had thought but of a probation—a time of trial wherein you might test my truth, my faithfulness,

my worth. Not even that humble petition was granted me. Without a word of trial, with scarce an opportunity of pleading my cause, the sentence was delivered—the sentence that swept away all memories of the past as though they had been cobwebs. Not such had they been to me; not so could I have dealt by you. But I had no ordinary foe to deal with: pride reared her chilling front against me—proper pride, forsooth! held me at arm's length. I submitted—I could not but submit. If the substance was not mine, should I plead for the shadow? No, truly; all or nothing was then, and shall be ever, my demand.'

He paused for a moment, while Gabrielle stood motionless, gazing downward at the embers, with clasped hands. She had been unprepared for this vehemence—it took her by surprise. It put into sharp, stinging words the reproaches she had already been dealing out to herself in no scant measure. It was true—too true. Her silence might perhaps admit that it was truth, yet she felt no wish to break that silence. Let him think what he liked. Now, on the verge of a life-long separation, he should carry with him into distant lands no cruel word from her lips to lend force to that image of chilling pride which he had pictured. If he thought of her with bitterness, it should be for no speech, not even in self-defence, spoken at that last interview. Let him think what he liked; if he knew the innermost workings of her heart, he would not judge her so harshly. She could not make these known to him, but she could keep silence—silence might perhaps plead for her; or, at least, it might recur to his remembrance in years to come, and bear dumb witness that, if pride had wrecked his happiness, that pride had found no advocate at their last and final interview.

'And now I come to bid you farewell. Do not think the worse of me that I could not say that word in public; if it is a weakness, it is one of which no man need feel ashamed. I have self-control—as much as most men—yet I could not say that word unmoved. It reminds me that the past is no more, and that the visions

with which fancy had decked the future are never to be realised. A future may be mine—who can say?—calm, peaceful, contented; but it will never be the future of my dreams—the future I first pictured to myself amid the old grey ruins where we read and dreamed away the days together, in that first springtide of life that was destined never to be renewed. Little I thought then that pride and self-will could ever step between hearts that knew no reservation, no distrust; or that the pledge which was to me but the final outpouring of all that swelled within my heart, could be to another a cruel and wounding fetter—a badge of slavery—to be cast aside at the first opportunity.

‘It must be spoken—why should I delay to speak it? why linger over memories fraught with so much pain? I may remember, for my own consolation, in future years, that my lips were not the first to utter the words that parted us asunder; let me not have to remember to my shame, that my lips were unequal to the task which other lips had found so easy. Farewell! may your future life be all I would fain have made it. May no regrets ever cast a cloud over the sunshine of your lot—no thought of one you could not love, ever rise between you and some other who may win and keep the love that was not for me. Farewell!’

But Gabrielle neither moved nor spoke. She stood, like a statue, in the same attitude, with hands clasped, and bent head. No movement gave proof that she had even heard the words addressed to her. But nature was not to be so silenced—the anguish she fain would not betray, found vent in two silent tears that dropped slowly, noiselessly down—down on the dress of pale silk—ah! tell-tale tears!—two large, unseemly blots, growing larger every instant, revealing that which was not to be revealed, disclosing the precious secret that was not to be disclosed.

There was a pause—how long a pause who could tell? when time was measured by sensations, not seconds—and then the silence was again broken; not by reproaches, not by farewells, but by a single word, that

burst forth out of the fulness of a yearning heart, subdued in tone by an overwhelming rush of tenderness:—

‘Gabrielle!’

Another pause; but ah! how brief!

‘Oh! Frank! Frank!’

And then Gabrielle was taken home—to the home that was more to her than Heatherbrae—out of which she had learned to know that neither Heatherbrae, nor any spot in the wide, wide world could be ‘home’ to her.

· If silence ensued, what marvel?

Now let us live our love: in after hours

Words shall fit handmaids to sweet memory be;

But let them not disturb these holier bowers,

The voiceless depths of perfect sympathy.

‘I hardly thought to hear that name from your lips, said Captain Kearney. ‘I feared I had long ago ceased to be “Frank” to you. Our great poet never made a more terrible blunder than when he said, “What’s in a name?” A name may awaken a lifetime of association—ten thousand assurances of affection would not have power to stir me like the sound of that name from your lips. Gabrielle! if I am “Frank” to you, all is right.’

‘Yes, all is right,’ murmured Gabrielle, out of the fulness of an ample contentment.

‘But how nearly otherwise!’ said Captain Kearney, gravely. ‘Is it possible that you would have let pride stand between us at such a moment?—when the issues of joy and anguish were trembling in the balance!—is it possible that you would have seen me depart without a word?’

‘Do not be hard upon me,’ said Gabrielle, falteringly. ‘How could I have spoken? No; if death had been the alternative, I must have kept silence.’

Captain Kearney shook his head. ‘And will not this pride come between us again in the future that is to be? Oh Gabrielle! consider!’

‘No, never,’ she exclaimed, as she took his hand

between hers, and caressed it pleadingly. 'All is changed now—I am changed most of all; pride is dead—there is no room for pride between us now. You do not know how I have changed within the last few weeks! Your words were cruel—but not too cruel; I had said all, and more than all, to myself in secret. I was infatuated—self-deceived; but I have learnt to know myself and my own weakness; yes, Frank, my weakness, and your strength.'

'Nay, Gabrielle, yours was the strength, mine the weakness; but for my weakness, who can say that seas might not ere long have rolled between us?'

'Be merciful,' she whispered, tearfully. 'Do not, in your strength, triumph over the weakness you have laid bare. I know now that self-will is not strength. I thought it was. And freedom is not liberty, though I took it to be.'

'But have you found liberty? have you defined her to your own satisfaction?'

'I think I have, but I am not going to define her now. She never perplexed you, and while you are in this cruel mood I must be careful to give you no unfair advantage.'

'At least, if you have found her, she dwells in chains—chains of our own forging—daisy chains—silken fetters—eh, Gabrielle?'

'Perhaps so; never mind. If a captive complains not of his fetters, why taunt him with them?'

'Why indeed? but that some have been known to glory in their bonds, and in bondage alone to find freedom. Console yourself; if you are bound, I am not free. We are both captive to a higher Will than our own.'

'And you will help me, direct me? I need a guide. I am weary of my own guidance—my own failures. Do not look so incredulous; this is truth.'

'It is true then that "high-heartedness is sometimes taught to bow." It was "high-heartedness" in you—I saw that at the first instant; yet none but a desperate and determined man would have undergone the ordeal of the past month in the hope of such a result. Even

my own resolute determination has faltered at times. How would it have been if I had taken you at your word, and in the pine plantation bid you adieu for ever ?

‘I should have deserved it.’

‘Undoubtedly ; but how with me ?’

‘You would have learned to rejoice over the danger you had escaped. The chilling image of pride would not long have held a place in your heart.’

‘But the question is, would the chilling image of pride have succeeded in displacing that other vision of warmth and truth that had held sway there for so long ?’

‘I cannot tell.’

‘Not easily, even if I had not seen through the flimsy veil that would fain have hidden the truth from my sight. I did see through it—at least, I thought I did—and I thought I saw too that the reign of the counterfeit image was destined to be a short one ; and I therefore resolved to bide my time and see.’

‘Did you care so much ?’

‘Did I care ? Oh, Gabrielle !’

‘Forgive me ; it only seems incredible that you should have cared when you came and found me so—so disappointing.’

‘Not you—only the chilling image——’

‘Yet that was me—at least, I thought it was. Are you sure that you know me now ?’

‘I think I do. At all events, I am not afraid.’

‘Because you have confidence in your own strength.’

‘No ; because I have confidence in you, and—strange to say—in your love. Does it seem credible to you that I can have confidence in your love, Gabrielle ?’

‘Yes ; for I fear you have read me all too plainly this last month. You might spare me, Frank. Whatever I have been, I am humble now ; why glory in humbling me still further ?’

‘Because revenge is sweet, and there is a long score to be settled between us. I have not always been on the winning side. Do not grudge me my short-lived triumph.’

‘I do not, provided it is short-lived. Yet surely a

generous victor forbears to trample on his vanquished adversary.'

'His adversary! consider—will you not recal the epithet?'

'His victim.'

'Nay; try yet once more.'

Gabrielle shook her head. 'I can do no better.'

'Must I help you? The victor in the tournament claims his "prize." His adversaries lie slain in the field below. They are "pride," "self-will," "proper pride," "freedom," and a multitude of minor foes. These vanquished, the prize is his own.'

'And then,' said Gabrielle, 'the attendants appear, and decently inter the remains of the slaughtered foe; and the knight, magnanimous in his triumph, directs that a seemly monument should be erected over the spot, engraved with the words "Requiescat in pace."'

CHAPTER XXX.

The spirit stoops
To drink with gratitude the crystal stream
Of unproved enjoyment; and is pleased
To muse, and be saluted by the air
Of meek repentance, wafting wallflower scents
From out the crumbling ruins of fallen pride.

The Excursion.

THE handle of the door was turned. Gabrielle would fain have started away from the arm that encircled her. But the arm held her fast, and she had no choice but to submit.

The intruder was Emma Mostyn. She had left the carriage at the foot of the hill, and, having entered at the wicket-gate that led into the garden, reached home some time before her companions. She entered the drawing-room in haste, then suddenly paused, as one transfixed with amazement, and stood uncertain whether to advance or retire.

'Come in, Miss Mostyn,' said Captain Kearney, encouragingly. 'Come in, and congratulate me upon the reward of five years' fidelity. You may well look astounded. I certainly did not wear the aspect of an accepted lover when you left home this morning.'

'Five years' fidelity!' repeated Emma, slowly. 'Is it possible, Gabrielle, that you have so deceived us?'

'She deceived no one but herself,' said Captain Kearney; and Gabrielle felt his clasp tighten, and was content to leave her defence in his hands. 'She made a mistake, and it is only to-day that the mistake has been discovered.'

'I do not understand,' said Emma, warmly. 'You seem to imply that my cousin has been engaged to you for five years. In that case, she has deceived us all.'

'Pardon me, I said nothing about your cousin being engaged to me—I spoke of five years' fidelity to her. Miss Hope's own sentiments have been involved in perplexity till lately.'

'A not very flattering admission on your part, Captain Kearney.'

'The poet thought otherwise, Miss Mostyn—

What we have won with pains we hold more fast,
What tarrieth long is sweeter at the last.'

'Let us hope, at all events,' said Emma, 'that the perplexity may never return.'

'We are not disturbed by any such fears. Our acquaintance is not a thing of yesterday.'

'So I suppose; yet I cannot but feel we have been hardly dealt with. Gabrielle never led us to imagine you had been more than an ordinary acquaintance.'

'What would you have had her do? Would it have increased your respect for her if she had whispered confidentially in the ear of every aunt and cousin, "This man loved me once, but I don't think it probable I shall reward his affection"?''

'I suppose Gabrielle knew her own mind on the subject?'

'That is just what she did not do. However, she

knows it now, and what is as much, or more to the purpose, I have had the happiness of sharing the discovery. You are not sympathetic, Miss Mostyn. I have been unable to wring from you even one lukewarm congratulation. However, I am too well content to be resentful, and I purpose gratifying your curiosity upon a point on which I was cruel enough to baffle it a short time ago.'

'I do not understand you.'

'Do you recollect the sketch of an ivy-clad ruin, and the pair who looked so well satisfied with each other's society? You asked me why I had not turned the faces a little round, that their features might be distinguishable. Those faces, matured by five years' thought and experience, are revealed to you now. Ask your cousin once more for the sketch you coveted. Perhaps she will be not unwilling to part with it now.'

Gabrielle shook her head. 'No, no; I cannot part with that one.'

'And I am sure I do not want it,' said Emma, loftily. 'We shall see what Mrs. Pierrepont thinks; but for my own part, I still hold to my first opinion, that Gabrielle has not dealt fairly by us.'

She left the room, and the sound of carriage-wheels was heard upon the gravel. Gabrielle longed to escape, yet felt that it would be an unworthy action to flee from whatever unpleasantness might be in store, leaving Frank to face it alone, so she resolved to remain and stand her ground.

But Captain Kearney had divined what was passing in her mind. He was not unaware that, though outwardly calm, she was inwardly much agitated, and he desired both now, and in all time to come, to shield her as far as might be from all trouble and annoyance.

'Go to your Aileen,' he said; 'tell her all that has passed, and I will join you presently in your own sitting-room. Leave me to break the news to your aunt and Colonel Mostyn.'

'I do not like to leave you to fulfil the task alone.'

Captain Kearney laughed. 'Is it so formidable an

office? Believe me, Gabrielle, if there were ten uncles and twenty aunts, instead of one, my pulse would not beat one whit the faster. Some explanations have power to agitate me, but they are not of this description.'

Gabrielle was only too glad to yield a ready obedience. She found Aileen still sitting over her work.

'You could not find the book,' observed Aileen, gently. 'I guessed that it must have been mislaid!'

And then, to Aileen's astonishment, Gabrielle broke into the merriest, most uncontrollable laugh she had heard for many a day. Still laughing, and utterly unable to compose her countenance, she threw her arms round Aileen and caressed her affectionately.

'O Aileen! the thought of the book upset my gravity. You have been sitting here over your work so monotonously contented, while I have been passing through the turmoil and excitement of a crisis of life downstairs. Aileen! I need not tell you—you can guess. Will you rejoice with me?'

And Aileen did rejoice sincerely, though she wept too. Those gentle drops, the overflowing of a full heart, were like the tears of a mother over a child's new-found happiness—tears of relief and thankfulness—and they affected Gabrielle also, for even before the mirthful mood had wholly passed away, she found herself mingling her tears with Aileen's, and not forgetting in her secret heart to send up thanks for this and every other blessing to the source from which all blessings flow.

Before long Captain Kearney joined them. Aileen was too shy to say much, but the little she did say came from the heart; and Gabrielle's gratification was as great as Aileen's, when Captain Kearney gave her a brotherly kiss, and said, 'Thank you, my new sister. You shall never want a home or a protector while we have a home in which to make you welcome.'

Mrs. Pierrepont followed almost immediately. 'Gabrielle, my love, let me wish you happiness. My dear, this news has taken me so much by surprise, I am unable to

express half I feel on the occasion. I am sure your uncle will be as astonished and delighted as I am myself. I cannot say much of Captain Kearney in his presence, my love, but I am sure I can say in all sincerity, that I believe this engagement will be very much for your happiness, and with still more confidence I can assert that he is, and ought to be, a very happy man.'

'A very bold man, Aunt Carry, I am sure you must think in your innermost heart, to undertake the task of taming so wilful a nature.'

'Ah! my love, he will be more equal to the task than I have ever been, and he will begin under more favourable auspices. Your faults are all virtues, Gabrielle, though they distressed me a little sometimes.'

'I do not think my new Mentor will acquiesce in that statement. The easy regimen of "laissez faire" is to be exchanged for a much more stringent discipline.'

'I can only hope that you will be so well agreed upon all points that your wills may never come into collision.'

'That is not likely,' said Gabrielle, thoughtfully. 'When they do, I suppose the weakest will go to the wall. Frank, have you considered this?'

'I have.'

'And settled to your own satisfaction the weighty point of which may be the weakest?'

'Perhaps so—even as you settled to your satisfaction the definition of true liberty.'

He held out his hand as he spoke, and, unseen, she placed her own within it. The warm clasp seemed to say that, though he had no intention of himself going to the wall, yet his will should ever be exercised for her happiness and welfare, who was dearer to him than life itself. So she construed it, and the eyes that were lifted to his beamed with entire acquiescence and contentment.

'And now, Gabrielle, I am glad to think we shall hear no more of that house in a bog,' said Mrs. Pierrepont, presently.

Gabrielle turned to Captain Kearney. 'That shall be as Frank may decide,' she said, quietly.

'The house in a bog must be retained at all costs,' he exclaimed. 'Think of the salubrity of the situation! If ever we are afflicted with tic-douloureux, rheumatism, neuralgia, or ague, a few weeks in the bog will effect a perfect cure. I feel the most lively interest in Heatherbrae. I long to see Gabrielle's beau-ideal of a home. It may not be possible to spend much of our time there, but at least it shall be our constant resort when I am not upon duty; and when I shall be superannuated, and Gabrielle an elderly lady in cap and spectacles, we will retire to the bog and end our days.'

Gabrielle smiled gratefully.

'And remember, Captain Kearney,' continued Mrs. Pierrepont, 'that our town-house shall always be open to you and Gabrielle. It will be our greatest happiness to receive you there.'

'And our great pleasure to come. But what about our sister Aileen?' said Captain Kearney, firmly. 'In all our plans she must share, as our home is always to be a home to her. Is she included in the invitation?'

Mrs. Pierrepont hesitated, but a moment's reflection convinced her that they were indeed too strong for her now, and that it would be wiser and more expedient to yield gracefully, and at once.

'I shall be glad to see Aileen too,' she contrived to say, and taking the gentle girl's hand, she just touched her cheek with her lips. After all, on these occasions a general amnesty was the most becoming proceeding, and since Aileen was to be recognised as a Hope by society at large, it would not be well to be behindhand in acknowledging her. Besides, when elegantly dressed and initiated into the mysteries of *bon ton*, she would be more than passable—her brown eyes and fair complexion might almost lay a claim to beauty.

'Surely, Captain Kearney, you will not now leave us to-night? This must have made a change in your arrangements.'

'It has indeed. I fear I am not stoical enough to carry

into effect my previous arrangements. The coming or going of a solitary bachelor is of so little importance in a household, that I shall venture to disappoint my friends, and write my apologies to-morrow. I may truthfully plead the existence of a more pressing engagement.'

'Well, I leave you now—do not forget to appear at dinner-time. I assure you, Gabrielle,' said Mrs. Pierrepont, with a mischievous expression of countenance, 'some of our friends have been very much startled by the "dénouement" that awaited our return.'

In the course of a few days the guests at Bournemouth began to disperse, and Mrs. Pierrepont proceeded to consider her arrangements for returning to town for the season.

'Gabrielle,' said Captain Kearney, one morning, when he found himself alone with her, 'have you been considering your plans? Do you follow your aunt to town?

'I think not; I have no fancy for a season in town. My thoughts travel homeward to Heatherbrae. It seems a long time since I saw my friends there, and my flowers. I have been thinking of Aileen too—I believe she is pining for home.'

'Have you been thinking of any one besides Aileen?'

'Yes; a good deal.'

'Let me hear what you have to propose for that nameless individual, who has begun to think that he is not included in any plan at present under contemplation.'

'I scarcely know what to propose—I am beset with difficulties. I should wish you beyond all things to go to Heatherbrae with us, yet I feel that to be impossible while Miss Tudor is absent.'

'Not quite impossible; but of that more hereafter. Meanwhile, will it distress you if I rejoin my regiment in Ireland? We shall probably be quartered at the Curragh for some time.'

'O Frank! are you in earnest?'

'I may perhaps obtain leave again some eight or nine months hence, and be able to eat my Christmas dinner with you.'

'Eight or nine months without seeing you!' and Ga-

brielle's eyes filled with tears. 'Is it possible you can speak of eight or nine months' absence in that tone?'

'Possible to speak of it, because so wholly impossible to endure it,' said Captain Kearney, drawing her towards him. 'Is the thought of separation as unendurable to you as it is to me? Have I become necessary to you already?'

'I never contemplated a long separation.'

'Yet you cannot invite me to Heatherbrae; and you must feel, as I do, that we cannot indefinitely prolong our stay with Mr. and Mrs. Pierrepont, even if such an arrangement were likely to conduce to our happiness.'

'You are generally fertile in suggestions. Have you nothing to propose now?'

'Yes, I have something to propose that would meet all difficulties. Give me the right to take my own Gabrielle to our own home at Heatherbrae.'

'What do you mean? Surely you cannot mean——'

'Is the thought new to you? It is not so to me. I have seen from the first that it was the only way out of our dilemma.'

'O Frank!' and Gabrielle's colour mounted high. 'It is unreasonable. You cannot ask such a thing—so soon, so very soon.'

'I do not measure time by days and hours. I think of my long probation—I think of the happy hours at Heidelberg, when such a proposal would have startled you less than it does now.'

'I was such a child.'

'Surely if an arrangement is in itself desirable, the sooner it is carried into effect the better.'

'So very soon,' remonstrated Gabrielle.

'We have no parents to consider,' said Captain Kearney, tenderly; 'none to whom our marriage will not be rather a gain than a loss. In the future we are to be all-sufficient for each other's happiness—is it not unreasonable to punish ourselves with the pain of separation, when a word from you might remove the necessity?'

Gabrielle was silent.

'Is it that you are not sure of your own feelings towards me?' asked Captain Kearney, gravely. 'Do you desire a longer space of time to test yourself and me?'

Gabrielle's tearful eyes were full of reproach.

'How can you be so cruel? Have I given you any cause to ask such a question? Surely I have done my best to atone for the past; ought it to be brought up against me now?'

'I was wrong,' he replied. 'Believe me, I distrust you not for one instant. How could I bear to do so, Gabrielle? But answer me one question. Is it not our happiness to be together? Can you bear to contemplate separation?'

'No, indeed, I cannot,' and she clasped his hand between hers.

'Then speak the word—the word that makes separation unnecessary. My Gabrielle, will you grant me this, my first request?'

'I will leave it to you, Frank. You shall not say that self-will stepped out of her grave to oppose you. She is dead and buried, and rests in peace. We will not disinter her. But you will be reasonable.'

'Most reasonable,' he exclaimed. 'My plan is, that you shall return to town with your aunt; make ready all preparations for the end of May; June we will spend at Heatherbrae, and then carry Aileen with us to the Emerald Isle.'

'You never forget Aileen,' said Gabrielle, gratefully.

'How could I forget one who has made herself dear to you? Besides, Aileen is sweetness personified. There is something most winning in her gentleness, and in her entire devotion to you. Aileen shall find a home with us until such time as she may have a home of her own. You will not quarrel with me for hoping that, for her own sake, this may some day be the case?'

'I will not quarrel with you,' said Gabrielle, who had been deeply gratified by the praise of her sister. 'But I may wish that men did not consider marriage so absolutely essential to a woman's happiness.'

'Then we must return to your old predilection for definitions. Can you define happiness?'

'Happiness is—the state of being well satisfied with your lot.'

'Nay, that is contentment.'

'Well, happiness is—the having nothing to distress or annoy you.'

'Nay, that is serenity.'

'Then happiness is—Oh! Frank, how you do love to pose me! I think happiness must be the feeling of wonderful joy that bubbles up and overflows in your heart sometimes—'

'When you discover that your tabby cat has become the joyful mother of three young kittens, or when your own pet cactus puts forth a fresh green shoot, or when you hear that your second cousin once removed is about to contract a brilliant alliance.'

'You are very severe. There are surely greater sources of joy and interest than these.'

'There are sources innumerable of contentment and thankfulness. But it is not only contentment and thankfulness that you feel, Gabrielle, when you lay your hand here within mine, and know that these two hands so linked are to go through life together; that the joy of one will sympathetically affect the other, and that in time of trouble they will only clasp the closer, and make their own warmth and unity the compensation for outward coldness and insincerity. Then that wonderful feeling may well bubble up and overflow—and this is my definition of happiness.'

'It is a man's definition, after all,' said Gabrielle, smiling. 'I think I was happy at Heatherbrae.'

'Perhaps so, for a time. You were in high youth and health, and then novelty is delightful. The question is—would Heatherbrae, with no new claims upon your affection and interest, have continued to make you happy?'

Gabrielle was silent; certain recollections came across her mind, and forbade an affirmative reply.

‘After all, Frank, happiness is not the end and object of life.’

‘Assuredly not: yet we must not be blamed for wishing our friends such a lot as we think best calculated to ensure happiness. In one form or another happiness is the goal towards which we are all pressing. Some pure and exalted natures forego happiness in this world, the better to secure bliss eternal in the next. Let us thank God for the joy He sends us here below, and never forget to listen for “those purer strains above,” which will still endure when heaven and earth shall have passed away.’

CHAPTER XXXI.

My Home! I seem to write that word
In characters more clear
Than other words,—more slowly round
I draw my pen, to keep the sound
Still lingering in my ear.—*Lord Houghton.*

AILEEN strolled round the fragrant garden at Heatherbrae in the pleasant month of June, noting the growth of Gabrielle’s favourite shrubs and flowers, and half bewildered by the luxuriance of bloom in the borders she had left comparatively bare.

She had arrived there the previous evening, in company with Miss Tudor, in order that she might secure a few hours to prepare for the reception of her sister. It was pleasant, indeed, to be at Heatherbrae once more. The glare and distraction of the season in town had made both sisters think, with increased fondness, of their country home, and Aileen’s spirits had risen continuously as she found herself drawing nearer and nearer to the only spot on earth that had ever been ‘home’ to her. She inhaled the clear, exhilarating air, with the eagerness of one to whose parched lips water is brought after

a long drought. It was like drinking in life again, after living in the atmosphere of the great city.

The garden was looking lovelier than she had ever before seen it, for the fall of the leaf had already commenced when Aileen first found refuge at Heatherbrae. She gathered bunches of the sweetest flowers for the vases within doors, for home was to wear its gayest aspect when first it saluted the eyes of Gabrielle and her husband. The chief element of gaiety, and the only one she could not herself have secured, had been granted to her fervent desire, in a brilliant day :—

No lark was out of tune ;
The hidden farms among the hills breathed straight
Their smoke toward heaven, the lime-tree scarcely stirred
Beneath the blue weight of the cloudless sky.

With her small black silk apron filled with flowers, Aileen returned to the drawing-room, which she found empty, Miss Tudor having gone to her own room to conclude the business of unpacking. Aileen collected together the vases she wished to fill, and placing her flowers on the table by her side, proceeded to arrange them.

She had left off her deep mourning on the day of her sister's marriage, and now wore a dress of clear lilac muslin, and some ribbons in her dark hair. Her face had latterly gained a roundness which it had formerly wanted, and a delicate pink colour relieved the extreme paleness of her complexion.

A visitor was announced, and she presently found herself face to face with Dr. Blyth.

‘ Good morning, Miss Hope ; you see I am not ignorant of the changes that have taken place at Heatherbrae.’

‘ So I perceive,’ said Aileen, blushing and smiling. ‘ I should hardly have thought you could have heard already of my change of name.’

‘ Nor should I have done so, but for a kind letter from your sister, which informed me of your relationship to her, and of her expected return this evening.’

'Did Gabrielle write to you? I suppose you were rather astonished at her news?'

'I was, I must confess, until I considered the matter over quietly.'

'And then you saw that it was not strange that I should have been drawn towards Kettlebury by the residence there of my only living relative. I feel now, and shall always feel, that I owe a great deal of my happiness to you. But for you I might never have resided under my sister's roof.'

'I do not repudiate your gratitude. I am glad you are grateful.'

Aileen smiled, and went on arranging her flowers.

'And now you must allow me to ask you whether Mrs. Kearney had any specific reason for shunning my acquaintance last winter? But for her kind letter, I should not have come here to-day. I have puzzled my brain in vain to solve the riddle, and a hundred different causes have presented themselves to my mind, but as they are all equally perplexing, I have resolved to appeal to you.'

'The reason was a very simple one,' said Aileen, with heightened colour; 'we were both young and we were alone, and my sister thought it scarcely consistent with etiquette that we should receive visits from gentlemen.'

'Yet you admitted Mr. Wheeler.'

'Gabrielle looked upon Mr. Wheeler almost in the light of a father——'

'Oh! I see. Well, I scarcely thought your sister would have been a slave to etiquette.'

'I ought not to have used the word,' said Aileen: 'you would surely expect my sister to consider propriety.'

'Perhaps so, but are you sure there was no other reason?'

'I believe that was the reason.'

'And now I suppose Mrs. Kearney will leave Heatherbrae altogether—sell the place perhaps.'

'Oh! no, they will still look upon this as their home, and spend as much time here as possible.'

'And you? Your sister's marriage must have made a difference to you?'

'Only that I have a brother as well as a sister.'

'But shall you remain at Heatherbrae, under the charge of a dueenna?'

'No; their home is to be my home always—everywhere; Frank, that is, Captain Kearney, has said that this shall be the case.'

'Indeed! Is it written in the law of the Medes and Persians?'

'I cannot tell;' and Aileen bent her head over her small white finger in search of a thorn.

'I hope not. A sister's home may be a happy one; but there are happier homes than even this.'

The remark called for no reply, and Aileen made none.

'Miss Hope,' continued Dr. Blyth, presently, 'may I tell you what I fancied was the reason of your sister repelling my visits last winter?'

'Yes, tell me, if you will.'

'Do you know, then, that I actually thought that a Kettlebury doctor might not be considered good enough company for a Miss Hope of Heatherbrae.'

Aileen flushed up indignantly. 'I can only say, then, that you know very little of my sister. If you did know how sincere and simple-minded and unworldly she is, you would scorn yourself for indulging such a thought.'

'Should I? And yet the thought is not an unreasonable one. I was never good at pedigrees, but I believe I come of an honest stock; but then I have neither house nor lands, wealth nor position, to recommend me. I am but the Kettlebury doctor, and your sister might be excused if she had admitted the thought to which I have alluded.'

Aileen made no reply, but went on arranging her flowers.

'You do not answer me.'

'No,' said Aileen, summoning her small forces, 'I do not think you deserve an answer. Yours is but the pride that apes humility, and unworthy of yourself or of my sister.'

Dr. Blyth looked gratified, and took a step nearer to the table and the flowers.

‘I have said thus much, and you have dispelled my fears. But I have more to say yet. It is for you to decide whether I shall say the rest, or whether I shall forbear.’

‘My sister will return this evening,’ said Aileen, hastily. ‘Anything you have to say, you can say to her. It will concern her more than me.’

‘On the contrary, it concerns you more than her. It is but right that it should be put into words, although I cannot but believe that you already know what I am about to tell you. You cannot but know that had Mrs. Kearney not discouraged my visits, I should ere this have asked her humble, friendless, portionless companion to be my wife—to accept of such a home as I could give her, and to let my love shelter her from the buffetings of the world.’

Aileen made no reply, and only redoubled her efforts to find that most perverse and invisible of thorns.

‘But now Mrs. Kearney’s humble companion is no more. She has departed, and in her place has appeared a second Miss Hope—no homeless, friendless orphan, but a happy, wealthy, prosperous young lady, surrounded by the luxuries of life, rich in a brother’s and a sister’s love, and not likely to want for suitors higher, wealthier, and more prepossessing than the Kettlebury doctor who loved the friendless orphan.’

He paused, and Aileen did not break the silence.

‘So now he awaits but his dismissal, and a word or two of reproach, perhaps, for having presumed to raise his eyes too high, before he returns to Kettlebury and duty, to endeavour to forget a day-dream not destined to be realised.’

The words were scarcely spoken ere Aileen stretched forth her little white hand, and faltered, ‘You were my first friend.’

‘Yes, your first friend, and I will be your last and best, if you will let me,’ said Arnold, clasping her hand within his own. ‘But, Aileen, I would have you con-

sider. You give up much if you give yourself to me. Will a husband's love, which shall be yours in no scant measure, make up for all you must sacrifice ?'

'It would be no sacrifice,' murmured Aileen, 'except as regards my sister. I hardly know how I could bear that—my Gabrielle—she was to be my one thought through life. It seems almost like breaking a vow.'

'It might have been so had you been necessary to her. But she has herself chosen a nearer and dearer tie. You can but hold the second place. And, pardon me, Aileen, but newly-married people are happier alone, even though the intruder be the best and most cherished of sisters.'

'I believe that to be true,' said Aileen, with somewhat of a sigh. 'They were too good, too considerate, to let me feel it, and yet the thought would sometimes arise.'

'But in that other home, humble as it would be, you would be no intruder, but the crowning happiness of a busy life. Think it over; your answer is still ungiven—you are free to choose.'

'No, I am not free,' said Aileen, trying to withdraw the hand that was held so fast. 'No one else would have chosen me in my poverty and loneliness. No; I hardly believe there is another in the wide world who would have been so disinterested, so wanting in worldly prudence, so heedless of his own success in life; and, in spite of herself, her tears fell fast over the flowers she was still pretending to arrange.'

'You mistake,' said Arnold, tenderly. 'I knew well what would best contribute to my own success in life. We do not read success as the world reads it, Aileen. With you to uphold me, I have no fear of not being successful. But there is still another point to be considered. You are not altogether your own. You owe much, besides affection, to the sister who received and acknowledged you, when many a sister would have closed her heart against you. I do not come to steal your love. I come to lay mine at your feet, and until you have consulted with your sister, and can

lay your hand in mine with her sanction and approval, I will not even venture to think of you as my own.'

'You need not fear Gabrielle,' said Aileen, softly. 'She would never allow her own wishes to stand in the way of the happiness of others.'

'Of others, Aileen?—then your happiness is somewhat concerned?'

Aileen's colour rose. 'You must not think I am not happy now,' she said, 'happy, most happy, with Gabrielle, only——' She paused, embarrassed.

'Say no more,' he exclaimed, 'Do not break the force of that delicious word. It is just so. We are both content, perfectly content with our lot in life, only——'

Aileen could not but smile.

'Only—that half can never be the perfect whole,' said Arnold, finishing the sentence. 'And less than the perfect whole cannot satisfy. And now, I hear your cousin coming, and must bid you adieu. I shall return this evening, and then learn my fate. Farewell, Aileen, for the present.'

He looked as if he would fain have clasped her in his arms, but he controlled himself; and after kissing the hand that lay in his again, and yet again, left the room as Miss Tudor entered it, making his apologies, and promising to return later in the day.

Miss Tudor was the most gentle and unsuspecting of women, but she was not wanting in observation, and Dr. Blyth's abrupt departure, and Aileen's fluttered demeanour, were not lost upon her.

'Your flowers are very pretty,' she observed; 'let me help you to arrange them. What time do you think we may expect Ella and Captain Kearney?'

'Not until the evening. Oh! do you know, Miss Tudor, that Adam and the Clack children have been making triumphal arches all the way up the drive! Adam sent to ask me to come and see what they were doing, and really it is excessively pretty. Molly, too, has been festooning the kitchen, as much as cook would

allow her to do, and they were all running about just now in a bower of evergreen.'

'Ella will be much pleased.'

'Yes, and Mr. Wheeler has arranged that the school-children, marshalled by Mrs. Primwell, are to be ready to scatter flowers along the road. And they are to wear for the first time to-day the pretty new livery Gabrielle provided for them while she was in town. The sober mouse-coloured dresses and jackets, turned up with blue, look so pretty, and the boys look equally nice in their dark blue suits. Gabrielle was afraid Mr. Wheeler would be rather disappointed at the absence of any bright colours, but I hope this will not be the case.'

'I recollect hearing Ella say that Mr. Wheeler wished scarlet to predominate in the dresses, but I think the present costume is more appropriate, and better suited to the season.'

'Mr. Wheeler will be quite compensated for his disappointment when he sees the design for a few model cottages which Frank and Gabrielle procured from an architect in town, and which are intended to supersede some of the most miserable of the hovels in S. Anne's parish.'

'I am afraid, if the plans are agreeable to Mr. Wheeler, they will be very much the reverse to Adam, whose dignity will be sorely offended if a style of residence superior to Rainbow Cottage should begin to prevail at S. Anne's.'

'But I doubt whether Adam's supreme self-complacency would allow him to think any erection superior to his own abode. It must be a happy thing to be on such good terms with oneself, and all that belongs to one.'

'Perhaps so; but I question whether Adam's self-complacency tends to make him beloved beyond the charmed circle by his own fireside; at least, I know Ella used to say——'

Miss Tudor's observation was interrupted by the announcement of fresh visitors, and presently Mrs. and Miss Melville entered the room.

'I am an early visitor,' said Mrs. Melville, 'because I did not wish to intrude upon the bride and bridegroom immediately upon their return home. How do you do, Miss Tudor? I am very glad to see you here again. Ah! Miss Aileen, I do not need to be told your news. Mrs. Kearney has kindly taken the trouble to inform us that we must no longer call you Miss Hart. Well, I congratulate you with all my heart, and I shall hope soon to congratulate Mrs. Kearney herself upon her two acquisitions. That nice, lively Mr. Bushby! I really thought we should have had him for a neighbour, but I suppose your sister was the best judge.'

'We shall have you for a neighbour, at all events,' said Miss Melville to Aileen. 'I am so glad. I hope we shall be great friends.'

'I hope so too,' responded Aileen, cordially; for both Gabrielle and herself had grown fond of the pretty brown-eyed girl during their winter at Heatherbrae.

'And now, Louisa,' said Mrs. Melville, who was comfortably seated in the corner of the sofa, 'let Araunah bring in my small offering, and your parcel as well. I always approve of the old Welsh fashion of the "bidding," where no guest comes to a wedding empty-handed. Costly gifts, at least such a gift as I could afford to give, would be valueless where there is already an abundance of wealth; but I have brought a gift which I think is not likely to be duplicated, and of which I am not a little proud. Araunah, bring that basket to me.'

Araunah, with his respectful bow, produced an ornamental basket of white osier, tastefully tied with white satin ribbon, and Mrs. Melville, having placed it on the sofa by her side, proceeded to open it. Miss Tudor and Aileen drew near with some curiosity, convinced that whatever the gift might be, it would prove of an original description.

When the basket was opened a layer of snow-white cotton wool was revealed, which was tenderly raised by Mrs. Melville. In a luxurious bed of white wool lay two of the smallest, roundest, and whitest sucking-pigs

the spectators had ever had the gratification of beholding. They were ready prepared for the spit, and were ornamented with sprigs of orange-blossom and bows of white satin ribbon.

Mrs. Melville contemplated them with a pride that was almost maternal in its benignity. 'Are they not little beauties? They were the finest of the whole litter, and I assure you the others were dainty morsels, were they not, Louisa?'

'Poor little things!' said Miss Tudor, feelingly. 'How innocent they look! It seems quite cruel to eat them.'

'Not at all,' said Mrs. Melville, stoically. 'Why should it be more cruel to eat them now than a twelvemonth hence? We do not sigh pathetically over a bacon pig, and yet the only difference is a twelvemonth of mangel-wurzel and barley meal, and wallowing in the mire. You must not cook them to-day, because I wish Mrs. Kearney to see them in all their beauty, but to-morrow, with plenty of stuffing and currants, they will make a suitable bridal repast.'

So saying, Mrs. Melville handed the basket to Aileen.

'And now, Louisa, produce your parcel. Oh! I see you have already been unpacking and arranging the contents. Well, they look very imposing. I hope Mrs. Kearney will find the inside as brilliant as the binding.'

While the others had been absorbed in the contemplation of Mrs. Melville's gift, Miss Melville had been opening an enormous brown paper parcel, which Araunah had with difficulty dragged into the room. As the table was already covered with flowers and books, the piano appeared to be the only place that offered accommodation for the contents of Miss Melville's parcel, and she had arranged thereon four-and-twenty volumes in blue jackets, elegantly lettered, making the piano resemble a bookstall at a railway station.

It must be confessed that both Miss Tudor and Aileen felt their breath taken away for an instant by this most unexpected display.

'It is only my book,' said Miss Melville, modestly and apologetically.

'Your own book?' enquired Miss Tudor, much mystified, 'or a magazine you have been contributing to? It reminds me of the Waverley novels. Why, you must have begun to write in long-clothes. Is it all one story?'

'Oh! you mistake,' explained Louisa. 'Miss Hope—that is, Mrs. Kearney—was kind enough to request me to keep back six copies of "Glow, Glimmer, and Gloom" for her, and as it is a novel in four volumes, this makes twenty-four volumes. I was very particular in having these sent to me before the work was given to the public, for in case there should be a great demand I knew Mrs. Kearney would be disappointed. I thought, too, she had very likely promised the extra copies to friends, and I should be sorry for so many persons to have their expectations raised for nothing.'

'The covers are very pretty,' said Miss Tudor, feeling some response was expected from her.

'Yes, and I managed to condense the tale into four volumes, after all. I hope you will tell Mrs. Kearney so. The publisher did not at all mind four volumes instead of three, because I undertook to hold myself responsible for the entire expense, and you know there cannot be much risk in this novel-reading age.'

'Louisa would not take the motto I suggested for the title-page,' said Mrs. Melville, drowsily. 'I tried to persuade her to put—

Sense may be all true and right—
But, Nonsense! thou art exquisite!

She seemed somehow to fancy it was not appropriate, and I suppose she ought to know best, for I have only read a few odd pages, and I think I must have been wool-gathering at the time, or else the motto would hardly have suggested itself to my mind as being so extremely apt.'

'You were wool-gathering, mamma,' retorted Miss Melville, with a mischievous glance at Aileen. 'It was

rust at the time that Araunah came in every morning to announce the arrival of "doubles" and "trebs," and you were so pre-occupied with visions of four-quarters and mint-sauce, and saddles and currant jelly, that I am sure your impression of my book must have been very vague indeed.'

'Well, Louisa, I have promised myself the gratification of hearing you read it aloud every evening, during the first hour after dinner.'

'Very likely, mamma, to a snoring accompaniment.'

'My dear, if there is any merit in the book, depend upon it you will not hear me snore. The same test applies to novels as to sermons. Nineteen may serve as composing draughts, but one out of every score will prove a stimulant.'

'Well, mamma, we ought to be going, for Miss Tudor and Miss Hope have doubtless much to arrange before evening.'

The sun, low in the horizon, was casting long slanting shadows eastward, when Gabrielle and her husband first came within sight of their moorland home. The birds chirped their vesper hymn in beech-tree and pine, the 'cuckoo's note at waning day' fell on the ear, and the sweet Sabbath stillness that always seems to pervade a summer evening, crept over the scene:—

That hour, once sacred to God's Presence, still
Keeps itself calmer from the touch of ill,
The holiest hour of earth. *Then* toil doth cease,
Then from the yoke the oxen find release;
Then man rests, pausing from his many cares,
And the world teems with children's sunset prayers!

'Your home, Frank,' said Gabrielle, as she looked across, from the high ground over which they were passing, at the luxuriant oasis which her grandfather's wealth and good taste had produced in the midst of the 'wild and heathy scene.'

'*Our* home,' said her husband, as his eyes took the direction of Gabrielle's. 'You may well be fond of

Heatherbrae. So this is your beau-ideal of a home, Gabrielle! Well, I was not prepared for so much loveliness after the conflicting descriptions I had heard of the spot. A man might be well content to pass the evening of life in such retirement as this.'

'So you are agreeably surprised,' said Gabrielle, with a gratified look. 'But suppose it had been otherwise; suppose the much-talked-of home had inspired you with aversion!'

'Well—home is not dependent on the building or the locality. A log-hut in a prairie wilderness might fulfil the conditions. You may be sure, that whatever the spot had proved to be on which you had placed your affections, I was prepared to love it for your sake, and to endeavour, as far as possible, to invest it with the charms that have always adorned "home" in my imagination.'

'You are a mystery to me, Frank,' said Gabrielle, looking at him affectionately. 'Before we were married you were fond of asserting your own will, and of trying to inspire me with dread of the state of submission upon which I was entering. Since then you have seemed to have no will but mine. I have but to express a wish, and at any cost to yourself I find it fulfilled.'

'Therein is to lie the secret of my strength,' said Captain Kearney, smiling. 'If I know myself, no self-interest shall ever interfere with your happiness, yet there may be cases in which it will be necessary for your decision to yield to mine—even cases in which the reason for my will being paramount may appear to you involved in perplexity, and in such cases I shall hope for trust and not conviction. In all other points it will be my pleasure to yield to you:—'

O it is excellent

To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous

To use it like a giant.'

'And to a judgment like yours, Frank, it will be a happiness and a relaxation to submit. But pardon me if I say that I do not think this can be the case in

all instances. Only unselfishness on a husband's part could make it endurable.'

'Perhaps so; but seeing it is the case in our instance, let us be content. Why, Gabrielle, I did not know you could boast of many male acquaintances at Kettlebury, and yet I see two gentlemen in advance of us, directing their steps apparently to Heatherbrae.'

'Ah, yes, Mr. Wheeler and Dr. Blyth; I wrote to them both to acquaint them with our expected arrival. If ever we have to part with our Aileen, Frank, I think it will be to the younger of those gentlemen, and I really believe he is worthy of her. Some day I will tell you of a most foolish and distressing blunder which I was guilty of in the forlorn spinsterhood of last winter, and to which only my late experiences have opened my eyes. You see I am not afraid to tell you of my follies.'

'You shall tell me of your follies, which I might not see, and I will myself find out your virtues, which I cannot fail to see. Is not that a lover-like speech with which to enter our own domain?'

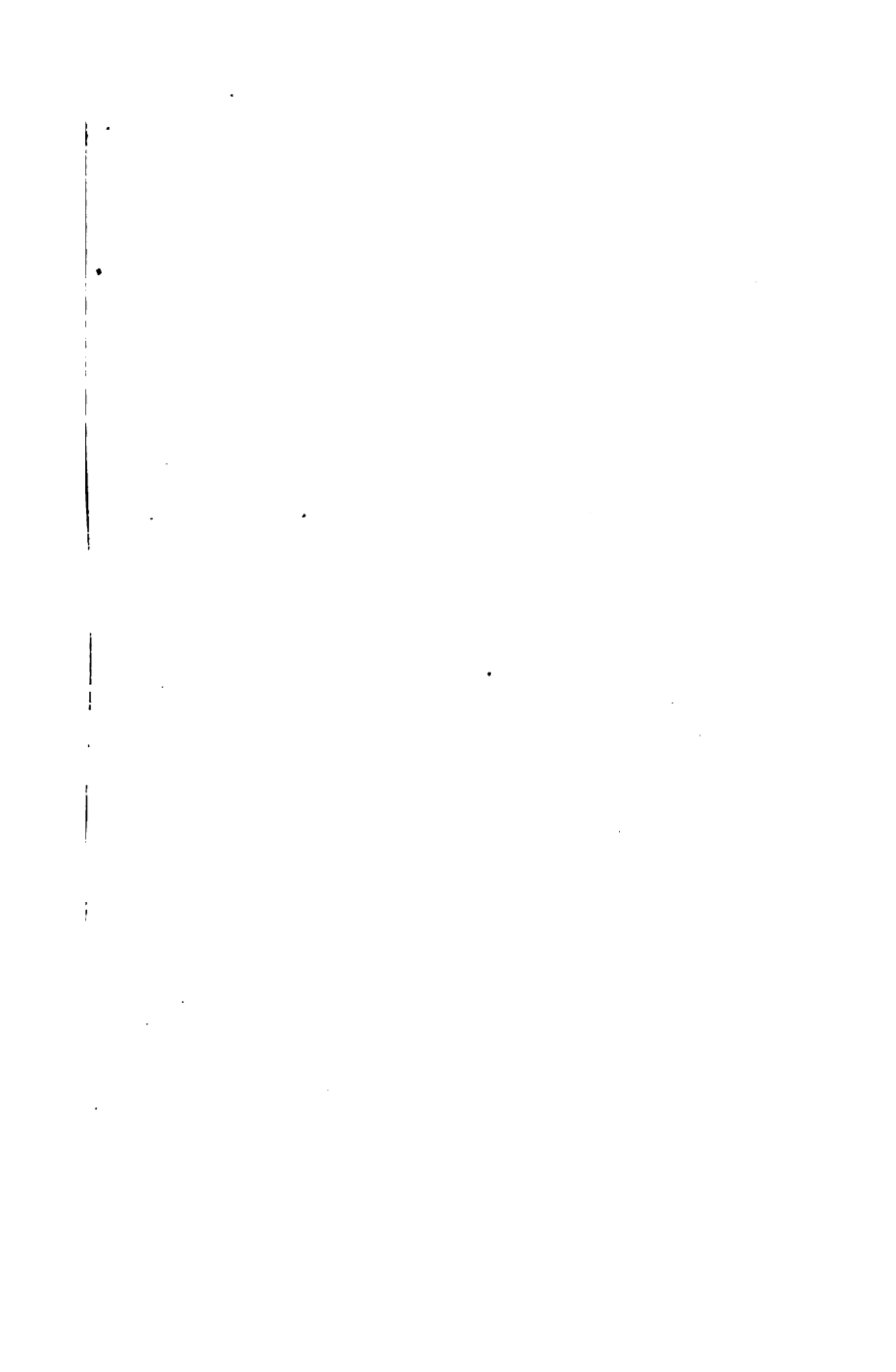
'More lover-like than true, I fear, since not a few of my follies have been brought to light, and trampled underfoot by you already. Never mind; I have heard you say that a perfect wife would be somewhat *ennuyante* after a time. No fear of my ever being *ennuyante* on that score.'

'A true wife is better than a perfect wife, and a true wife I know to be mine.'

'And oh! Frank, here is your first introduction to Adam Clack. No one but himself can have constructed this arch of flowers beneath which we are to pass. And see—in letters of roses—the sweet old English phrase, which to English ears can never become worn or vapid—which can never cease to find a response in every English breast—"Welcome Home."

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET



20

Stanford University Libraries



3 6105 019 565 238

STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
CECIL H. GREEN LIBRARY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004
(415) 723-1493

All books may be recalled after 7 days

DATE DUE